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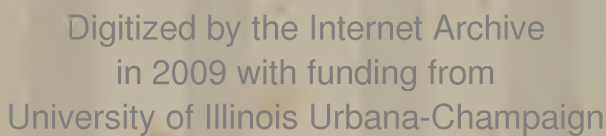


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Q U E E N M A B.

VOL. II.



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Q U E E N M A B.

BY

JULIA KAVANAGH,

AUTHOR OF

“NATHALIE,” “ADELE,”

&c., &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON:

HURST AND BLACKETT, PUBLISHERS,
SUCCESSORS TO HENRY COLBURN,
13, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.

1863.

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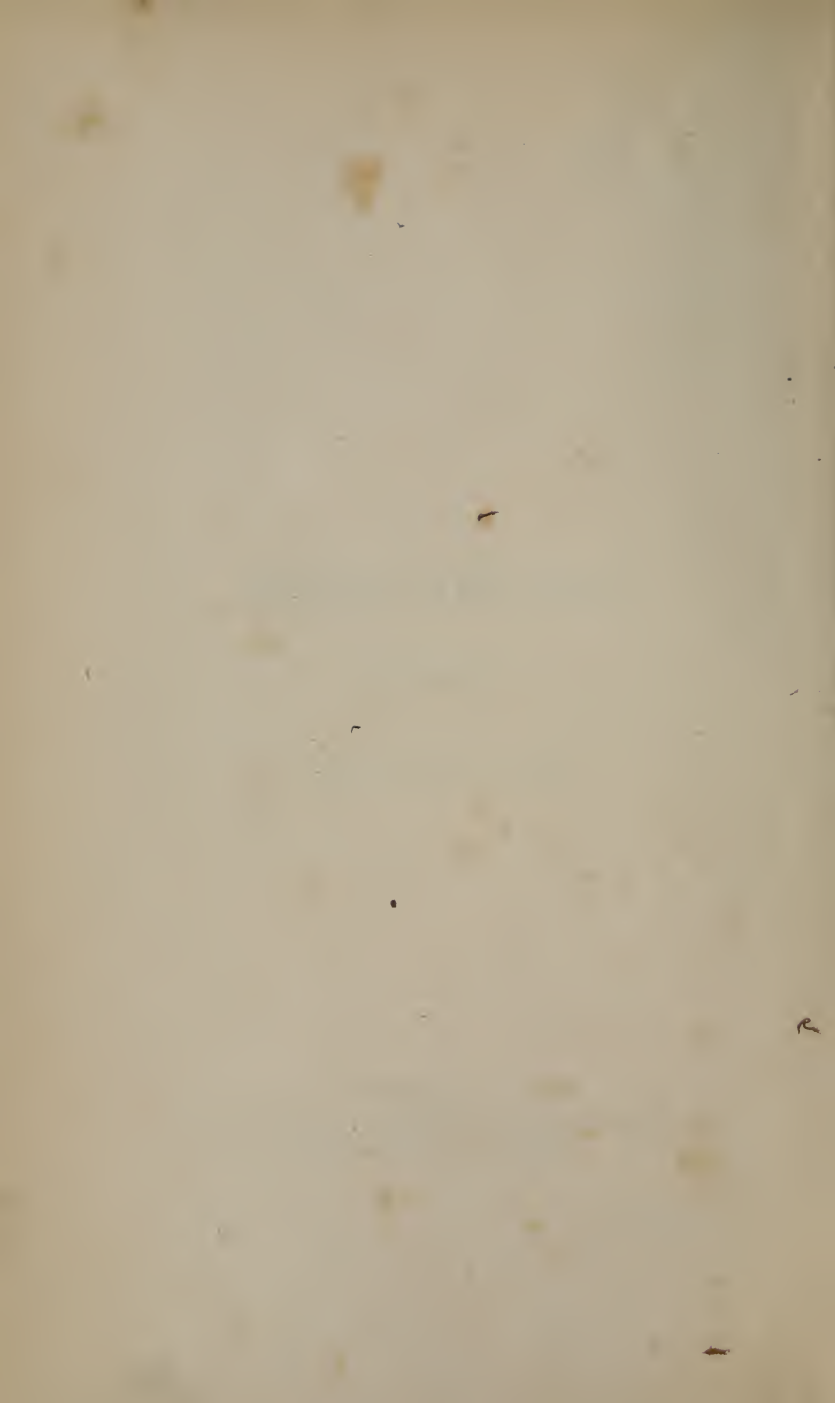
LONDON :
PRINTED BY MACDONALD AND TUGWELL, BLENHEIM HOUSE,
BLENHEIM STREET, OXFORD STREET.

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CONTINUED.

MR. FORD'S SON.



QUEEN MAB.

CHAPTER VII.

THE excitement of Frederick's presence had subsided by the next morning; besides the offices, inexorable as fate, kept their jaws open to receive their victims. The three brothers dropped off after breakfast, and, to Miss Lavinia's relief, and Robert's satisfaction, Frederick Norton went with them.

"My dear," said Miss Ford to Mab, "you have more money, I hope?"

"Plenty, aunt," gaily replied Mab, to whom the sum of forty pounds, left by Mr. Ford, seemed an inexhaustible supply.

"Well, then," rejoined Miss Ford, with a cheer-

ful alacrity inspired by the unusual consciousness of having money to spend, "what shall we have for dinner?"

A council was held, and its result would have horrified Mr. Ford; but Mab had a generous heart and an open hand, and money being at her command, she did not know how to spare.

Frederick Norton made his appearance a little before dinner-time. Miss Ford was engaged upstairs, and Mab was reading in the garden.

"I am afraid I am disturbing you," he said, seeming rather agitated.

"Do not mention it," sweetly answered Mab as she closed her book.

"You were—reading," hesitatingly continued Frederick.

Mab was going to reply that she was, when a yelping sound which seemed to proceed from Frederick's waistcoat, made her start. The young man laughed, and Mab remained amazed to see a small black dog's head, with erect ears and round bright eyes, appear in the place whence the yelping sound had proceeded.

"Come, Fancy, show yourself to your mistress," gaily said Frederick, putting down on the gravel of the garden a perfect and diminutive terrier. A bright brass collar was around its neck, and attached to this was a blue leash, which Frederick put into

Mab's hand; upon which Fancy half strangled herself, in vain efforts to fly at the young man, and not being able to effect her purpose, barked furiously.

"What a lovely little creature!" cried Mab, delighted; "how can I thank you, Mr. Norton! But where and how did you procure such a beauty?"

"A most fortunate accident," replied Frederick; "I called on a friend of my father's, and found the whole family frenzied with alarm. This passionate little wretch had barked at a rich bachelor uncle, who had declared he would not put his foot in the house whilst the dog remained in it. I offered to take it away at once; and this being accepted, I brought it to you."

"Does it bite?" asked Mab.

"It will not bite you," confidently replied young Norton, who knew from the dealer who had sold her, that though Fancy might bark, her bite was as great a fiction as the story of the bachelor uncle. And, indeed, Fancy, on being taken up in her new mistress's arms, showed a fond though jealous disposition. She licked Mab's hands and growled at Frederick, who entertained himself with teasing her, and who found the task so amusing, that he never thought of relinquishing it, or of releasing Mab until Robert and his brothers came in.

This time Robert showed decided temper. He

looked dark at Frederick, and scowled at Fancy, who showed him her teeth; and to Mab he said, with much asperity,

“What do you want with that ill-tempered little brute?”

“To pet it,” answered Mab, nursing Fancy, who, curling round, began snoring in her lap.

Robert looked as he felt, deeply displeased, and walked away coldly and haughtily; whilst Mab, resolved to brave him, bestowed her sweetest smiles on the giver of Fancy. But if Mab thought to carry on this pleasant pastime of teasing Robert and charming his rival for any length of time, she was destined to grievous disappointment.

Scarcely was dinner over when two ladies were announced.

“What name, Lucy?” asked Miss Ford, rising in a flutter; visitors were very rare at Queen Square.

“Mrs. and Miss Norton,” answered a strong distinct voice in the hall, and Mrs. Norton appeared in the doorway, followed by Ellen, now a very pretty girl, with a very sweet dark face.

“So you dine late,” said Mrs. Norton, nodding at Miss Ford; “well, you are altered—and where is grey-eyes?”

And as she spoke she fastened a piercing look on Mab, who rose blushing and smiling.

That look strengthened Mrs. Norton's resolve. On coming home from Ireland that morning, Mrs. Norton had learned that her nephew was domiciled at Mr. Ford's. Now, she also knew that there was a young girl in Mr. Ford's family, and she held this arrangement to be a highly dangerous one. She felt convinced, on what grounds we know not, that Frederick was of an inflammable nature, and she strongly suspected that Mab had grown up with a tolerable share of good looks. A glance at the young girl now convinced her of her nephew's peril, and she came to the rescue, with that straightforwardness which was part of her tactics.

"I have come to rid you of your guest," she said, nodding at Frederick, and addressing Miss Ford; "a pretty thing he did to come here, when his aunt and sister expected him to take them about London."

"Dear me!" murmured Miss Ford, "I am very sorry we have robbed you, Mrs. Norton."

"No time lost," said that lady cheerfully; "he can see us home—his room is ready."

Now this was a most awkward speech for Mrs. Norton's nephew. Vexed though he was to go, Frederick Norton could no more express a wish to remain, than Mab could press him to do so. Robert would not put in a word to detain him, and Miss Lavinia was only too glad to have him out of the

house. William and Edward remonstrated indeed, but were at once silenced by Mrs. Norton.

"Fiddlededee, young men!" she said, "you can't want my nephew as much as I do—besides, you are very welcome to come and see him. So let's hear no more about it."

Of course no more could be said. Thus ended Mr. Norton's brief visit, to Robert's satisfaction, and Mab's annoyance. Her displeasure was not lessened by the open admiration with which Robert Ford regarded his pretty cousin, Ellen. The young lady received this flattery of looks with a graceful shyness which reminded Mab rather bitterly of old times, but which Robert called "sweet modesty." Mab scorned to seem envious, and she therefore joined in his admiration: and, when the visitors were gone, confessed that "Miss Norton was a very lovely girl, indeed!" but she treasured up her secret resentment, and found means to give it vent the very next morning.

"Mab," said Robert to her, after breakfast, "I am not going into the city until the afternoon, for I am to attend to some business in the west end for Mr. George—and this leaves me a full hour to spare. Had we not better read a little French together?"

"Thank—you," negligently replied Mab; "I think I shall go out this morning."

"Where are you going, my dear?" asked Miss Lavinia.

"I don't know—I want to take out Fancy: these little creatures want a good deal of exercise."

Miss Ford groaned inwardly at the irreverent reply, and Robert bit his lip; but Mab's will, though not often asserted, was not to be disputed. She put on her bonnet, and went out with Fancy. It may be that Mab had hoped and expected to be accompanied. Certain it is that her solitary walk, though rather a long one, did not put her in a better humour, nor did it lessen her displeasure to hear Miss Ford say to her, when she returned:

"My dear, what a pity you were out! Mrs. and Miss Norton came in a carriage for you. They wanted to take you out driving—I forget where, but to some delightful place. Miss Norton looked lovely this morning. More so than last night, Robert said."

Mab untied her bonnet-strings, and tossed the bonnet itself on the sofa.

"I am so hot!" she said, in answer to Miss Lavinia's surprised look.

"You do look hot; and this has been quite a morning of calls—I have had a visit from the Irish Fords."

The Irish Fords were a branch of the Lanca-

shire Fords, who had settled and married in Ireland three generations back, but who had kept up the connexion with their English relatives. The last representatives of this emigrant branch were two twin sisters, who had paid many a summer visit to Mr. Ford's mother, when Mr. Ford had flirted with them, said his sister; that is to say, when the whole four were young. Mab had often heard of the beauty of the twin sisters, of their lovely complexions, bright hair, and blue eyes, and of their fondness for each other.

"And have the Miss Fords been here?" she asked.

"Oh! no; they never stir now; but their half-brother has been, Mr. O'Lally. He came to London on business. I wonder what he does; and he brought me some Balbriggan stockings—so kind of the twins!"

"But, aunt, that Mr. O'Lally is nothing to you."

"Well, no, for he is all Irish, I suppose. His mother was a—I never can remember those O's and Macs—and I wonder what his father was?" added Miss Lavinia, with a deeply perplexed look.

"An O'Lally," suggested Mab.

"Oh, to be sure! and it seems they think a great deal of him. He is a very handsome young man, and he seems dotingly fond of his sisters; I dare say they have been quite mothers to him."

“And when is he calling again?”

“I am sure I don’t know. He is going off to Ireland to-night; I wonder people will travel at night.”

A bright idea struck Mab. She wanted to quarrel with Robert, and she could not quarrel with him about Ellen. That Mr. O’Lally, whom she had not seen, and would most probably never see, would do very well. She opened the door of the back parlour, where Robert sat writing, and, closing it again so that Miss Ford might not hear her, she said, pettishly:

“Oh! Robert, how tiresome you are! Why did you not keep that Mr. O’Lally for me to see him?”

Robert raised his eyes, and looked at her.

“To see him. What for?”

“What for! aunt has set me wild about him. So handsome, so amiable, so charming! Now, you know, I never see a new face, and since poor Mr. Norton is gone, you might have been humane enough to save up this delightful Irishman for me.”

“I am sorry I did not think of it,” gravely replied Robert; “Mr. O’Lally is indeed a remarkable young man; but perhaps he would not have let himself be saved up for you, Mab.”

“Remarkable! Oh! Robert, you are very tiresome. Did a remarkable man come within my

reach, as it were, and did he escape me? It was cruel of you, Robert."

"I can describe him for you," kindly said Robert; "and as I had to keep him in conversation for half-an-hour, whilst aunt was putting on her best cap, you will grant I had opportunity for observation."

"Well then, describe," said Mab, much piqued.

"Mr. O'Lally is about my age, decidedly handsome, and very like a remarkable individual whom I will not mention, to leave you the pleasure of guessing."

"Thank you."

"Like most Irishmen, he talks very well."

"I like a good talker."

"I think he is amiable."

"I hope he is not good-natured."

"Good-natured is the last epithet you would apply to him."

"I am so glad! I hate a good-natured man."

"Thank you," said Robert, in his turn; he was beginning to lose his temper.

"You need not, I speak as I think; and so Mr. O'Lally is amiable."

"I have a strong impression that Mr. O'Lally is amiable because it is part of his design to fascinate, and he wishes to fascinate because he wishes to rule."

"A charming but incomplete description. Pray, go on."

"I shall go on with my writing, if you please," coldly answered Robert. "I have said enough to enlighten you, and I am very busy."

"Then you will tell me no more."

"There is no more to tell."

"And in half an hour Mr. O'Lally said nothing to you."

"He said plenty, but I have not the art of repeating conversation."

"I am much obliged to you, Robert. I do not ask you to talk on your own account, only to repeat a conversation which has just taken place, and you are too busy."

"You are very unreasonable, Mab."

"Of course I am. It is not you who are unkind. But the truth is, Robert, you were not pleased that Mr. Norton should be here, and you are displeased that I think so much of this stranger."

Robert laughed scornfully. He would not be jealous of a man Mab had never seen ; but he said rather sharply :

"Mab, you are very ——"

"Disagreeable," she interrupted ; "thank you, Robert," and she flew out of the room, looking very indignant, but not sorry in her heart at having made a real quarrel out of Mr. O'Lally.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE event proved the wisdom of Mab's plan. Alarmed at her displeasure, Robert lost no time in seeking a reconciliation ; peace and oblivion were decreed, and a pic-nic, to take place in Richmond Park, was decided upon, as the basis of the treaty. The Nortons were included in this plan : Robert tacitly agreed to tolerate Frederick, and as tacitly Mab consented to suffer his sister's presence.

"My dear, it will cost a great deal of money," timidly objected Miss Ford.

"No, it will not, aunt. Besides, we must have a little pleasure," decisively answered Mab.

Susan's censures in the kitchen were very significant, but only addressed to Lucy's confidential ears.

"The little upstart is going on finely whilst mas-

ter is away," she said; "if my poor mistress were alive, and saw all these doings!"

But Lucy liked Mab, and took her part.

"Miss Mab has a spirit of her own," she said; "And I like her for it."

At length the day came; the morning was lovely. Mab's heart beat with pleasure, when, running to her window, she saw the blue sky and the shining sun.

"Oh! aunt!" she cried to Miss Lavinia, "it is so fine, shall I go down and pack the hampers?"

"My dear, it is only six o'clock."

"But, aunt, we cannot go too early, can we?"

And without heeding Miss Ford's objections, she went down and set to work in good earnest. Thanks to her energetic efforts, there really was very little delay; breakfast was got over in good time; by nine two open carriages were at the door, and by half-past nine they were rolling away. The contents of the carriages were distributed as follows: Miss Lavinia, Mrs. Norron, Ellen, and Robert, were in one; Mab, Frederick, and Edward, and William were in the other.

Robert had firmly, inexorably resolved to be with Mab, but Ellen had as firmly resolved that he should be with her; her brother was no *cavalier servente*, and William and Edward were worse than nothing. Feminine will opposed to masculine will was sure

to carry the day ; but Ellen, who was seated next him, looked so pretty and so demure in her white chip bonnet and pink muslin, that consolation came to Robert whether he liked it or not.

There are few spots more beautiful than Richmond Park, and few views are so sweet in their way as the view from Richmond Hill. It was there they alighted. Mab stood and looked with Fancy in her arms, and forgot Frederick and Robert, and the whole world, indeed, in that sweet vision of verdure and water, so silvan and so romantic, which she had not seen since childhood.

"Is it not lovely?" whispered Frederick, glad of the opportunity of hanging over her.

"It is exquisite!" replied Mab ; "do look, Robert."

"I am looking," shortly answered Robert, who was looking not exactly at Father Thames, and at his enchanting banks, but at Frederick's enamoured attitude, and who found the prospect odious. Mab saw the look, and it amused her. At once proving herself expert in the innate art of flirting, she made good her hold on the two young men. Ellen had to be satisfied with the doubtful chivalry of William and Edward, Miss Lavinia kept Mrs. Norton company, and Mab stayed behind with her two admirers.

With jealous anger, Robert saw that this fond

young girl, until now the slave of his will, had looks and smiles for Frederick. Yet she held between him and his rival a sort of even balance which angered him even more than all. She gaily threw her flowing cloak to young Norton, then ran on alone in the grass with Fancy at her heels; and when they overtook her, it was Robert's arm she accepted, and by Robert's side that she walked; but as she did so, she kindly gave Frederick a sort of shy look that meant, "I could not be so free with you, you know," and that reconciled him to his fate. He lingered behind them, and Mab, glancing round now and then, rewarded him for his patience by kind glances and pleasant words, though few, and every time she turned thus, the heavens opened and the sun shone on Frederick Norton. Robert, highly displeased, once made a feint of relinquishing her arm, but Mab cured him of the fancy by saying in a low, arch tone,

"Are you tired? Shall I take Frederick's arm?"

Robert did not answer, but walked on in gloomy silence, meditating revenge. At length they came to a green and secluded spot, where the two elder ladies stopped.

"I think we may camp here," said Mrs. Norton, sitting down. Everyone followed her example. The hampers were brought and unpacked, and their

contents, spread on a snow-white damask cloth, were done full justice to. The cold fowls, the salad, the ham, the tart, the bottled beer, were delicious in their way, and the open air sharpened healthy appetites which love itself could not have conquered.

When the meal was over, William took out his fiddle and struck up a tune. Politeness compelled Robert to choose Ellen for his partner, and to leave Mab to Frederick. The dancing was kept up until the orchestra declared himself tired, and suggested an exploring expedition.

"Yes, yes, go all of you," said Mrs. Norton ;
"I shall stay and keep Miss Ford company."

Meek Miss Ford assented, and off they went laughing, running, and finally separating. Ellen was resolved to have her share of Robert this time, and having contrived to stumble in the very beginning, she accepted his assistance, and kept him chained to her side by the tyrant courtesy.

Mab, in the meanwhile, felt wild with excitement and pleasure. She ran on, not caring who followed ; there was grass beneath her feet, there were leaves, thick and green, above her head ; it was a beautiful day—a lovely day—and Mab felt very happy. Frederick did not lose sight of her. Fleet though she was, he soon overtook her ; he was not given to classical allusions, but, as he

followed her waving garments, he could not help thinking of heathen nymphs, and how pleasant the fauns, who ran after these light-footed goddesses, must have found the task, if, and he much doubted it, their mythological ladyships were half as pretty as was Mab. She heard his quick step behind her, and, looking round, stopped short.

"Let us wait for the rest," she said, and, throwing her hat on the grass, she sat down at the foot of a gigantic oak. Frederick leaned against the trunk, and looked down at her. In a voice tremulous with emotion, he ventured on the first compliment he had paid her yet.

"How lovely you look in all this green!"

His eyes said far more than his words. They spoke admiration bordering on tenderness, and Mab understood their language. Her lids drooped, she felt a woman's power, and the revelation was grateful.

Still she thought it better to rise, and to look for the rest, as she said; they were soon found. William and Edward, shouting and excited, Ellen pretty and rosy, and Robert, black and sullen, in the rear. Now Mab did not want to be with Robert, but, very perversely, she did not want him to be with Ellen. She knew the means to draw him away, and she used them unsparingly. Poor Frederick! His heart was finally lost that day. Un-

conscious and reckless of Robert's jealous eyes, he followed Mab like her shadow. He gathered flowers for her, and rushed amongst the briars, and tore his hands recklessly to get those she preferred. He got his legs wet, too, to procure her a water-plant she fancied ; he did, in short, what most men in love do, and to all eyes save Mab's and Robert's he looked extremely foolish. Indeed, his aunt and his sister indignantly told him, the next day, he had behaved like an idiot ; agreeing for once—a rare occurrence—and even Miss Lavinia, the most lenient of women, privately informed Mab that Mr. Norton was quite absurd. But, as we have said, Mab did not think so, still less did Robert. Mr. Ford's eldest son now discovered to his cost that he was of a jealous temper. Mab's flirting had indeed very unfortunate consequences. Robert forgot his prudent resolve to be silent with Mab until he had finally settled with Mr. George. He only remembered that, if he could trust his eyes, the prize he had been planning to have so long was just ready to slip out of his fingers. He determined that it should not, come what would. And, as he was young still, he acted at once on that determination.

"Aunt," he whispered to Miss Lavinia, "do keep Mr. Norton a little bit, will you?"

"Certainly, my dear Robert."

And whilst Miss Lavinia claimed Frederick's

attention and perplexed him with botanical questions, Robert, hastily taking Mab's arm, led her away.

"Robert," she cried, "what is the matter?"

But he walked on until a sufficient distance spread between them and the party, then, stopping short and dropping Mab's arm, he looked at her.

Mab required no words from him to tell her what was coming. With the quickness of thought she guessed it. Her heart beat, and she felt faint; but, rallying, she said,

"What is it, Robert?"

"Mab, I do not think I need tell you how dear you are to me. I believe your affection for me is great, but how great I cannot know unless your words confirm it. Mab, we have known each other many years—why should we not spend our two lives together?"

He took her hand and looked in her face, not with the ardour Frederick would have shown under similar circumstances, but with enough of genuine tenderness to move her. Still she did not reply.

"Mab, will you be my wife?" he continued.

"Perhaps so," she answered, looking up at him, and her lips breaking into a rosy smile.

"Perhaps so!"

"Well, then, some day, if you like, but not just yet."

The answer was not wholly displeasing to Robert; for of course he did not want to marry Mab just yet, but it was not wholly satisfactory either, for Mab did not seem as seriously impressed as he wished her to be.

"Mab," he said, a little imperiously, "there must be no misunderstanding, You have tried me strangely to-day, but I will be so tried no more."

"Indeed!"

"No. You like Norton—all right and good; but you must love me only, Mab. You are mine—all mine. Remember that."

Mab felt a little frightened at his tone. She loved Robert dearly, she had always thought and expected to be his wife some day, she certainly preferred him to Frederick, and she was woman enough to like his vehement assertion of a right over her, and, half proudly, half shyly, she said:

"Don't be foolish, old Robert—you know there is no one like you."

But old Robert was not easily moved from his purpose.

"Mab," he said, "it must be a clear understanding; once for all, are you my wife, or are you not?"

"I am not," answered Mab, "but——" she added, smiling.

"But you will be," he continued for her. "Mab,

you are honourable ; give me your hand and your word, and I will trust you with a dozen Fredericks."

Mab was touched. She gave him her hand, and, looking him honestly in the face, she said :

"Robert, if uncle consents—I do."

The last cloud cleared from Robert's countenance ; he smiled and looked quite handsome.

"Let us sit down a while and talk," he said.

"Talk of what?" asked Mab, sinking down lazily on a green knoll.

"Of love, if you like," replied Robert.

He took her hand again, and looked fondly in her face. He had never liked her better than he did now. Jealousy had done him good, and rivalry had heightened Mab's charms. Besides, she now looked very pretty. There was the light in her eyes and the glow on her cheeks, which provoke and attract. She was in a coquettish mood, too, and, laughing in his face, said saucily :

"Talk."

"Yes, Mab, I will talk. We shall soon be married, I hope."

"Soon !" cried Mab, frightened.

"Well, in a few years," replied the phlegmatic Robert ; "and then," he added, with more ardour, "then, Mab, we shall indeed be happy. In the first place, we must have a villa somewhere, say on the Thames."

Mab opened her eyes.

"We are both fond of the country, and we shall like that. You will have plenty to see to at home, a garden with roses and swans, Mab, and I shall turn my mind to agricultural pursuits."

"But, old Robert, the money!"

"Never mind about the money," was his calm reply, "we shall have it. I do not care for a large house—and, indeed, I was wrong to say a villa, I should prefer a farm, a handsome one, of course. It would be pleasant to have the boys down on a Sunday, or during their holidays. It would do them all the good in the world, poor fellows. Besides, we could assist them other ways. We should have Aunt Lavinia, too."

"And uncle?" suggested Mab.

"Of course. Well, what do you say to my plans?"

"How will you carry them out, Robert?"

"Never mind how. What will you say to me if I do carry them out?"

"Say! Robert, I shall adore you."

"I wish you would begin now," he replied, a little impatiently; "you are not as fond of me as you might be, Mab."

Mab replied, "Nonsense;" but not much liking the turn Robert's thoughts and conversation were both taking, she rose and said they must join the party.

Evening was closing in, and all agreed it was time to go. True to his promise of trusting her with a dozen Fredericks, Robert made no effort to be in the same carriage with Mab. The drive home was lovely; Frederick Norton thought it enchanting. The sky was covered with light mists, through which shone the fair moon: William and Edward talked and laughed incessantly. Mab spoke not one word—she was thinking of what had just passed, and she felt frightened at her own rashness. It was not that Robert was not acceptable to her; from her childhood she had thought, vaguely at first, definitely enough in latter years, that she was to be his wife. She was troubled with no doubts, no fears concerning their mutual affection; of course he loved her, and of course she loved him. No; what frightened her was the marriage, the tie, the new existence that lay before her. Robert, who was practical, had at once placed their wedded life before her view; and even the villa on the Thames could not reconcile Mab to the vision. She remained very quiet, thinking and wondering, and Frederick Norton, sitting by her side, was, in the meanwhile, in the seventh heavens, unconscious that his paradise had already been given away for ever.

As soon as they reached home, Mab ran up to her room, and there, when she joined her later,

Miss Lavinia found her sitting with her elbow on the table, and her cheek on her hand.

"My dear, what is it?" she asked, kindly.

Mab looked very grave, and replied:

"I am engaged to Robert."

"I am so glad!" cried Miss Lavinia, beaming; "I always knew it would be, but I am so glad. You are worthy of him, and I can say no more."

She could not, indeed, in her creed.

"Robert is very good," said Mab.

"My dear, he is noble, he is great!"

Mab was silent.

"You will be the happiest of women," continued Miss Lavinia.

"Robert cannot marry just yet, can he?" asked Mab.

"Well, I am afraid he cannot, my dear; remember, a hundred and fifty pounds a year is but a small income."

"Of course," nodded Mab; "I daresay he cannot marry for five years, aunt."

"Well, you are both so young."

"Then it is all right," interrupted Mab; "I got quite frightened coming home at the thought of a wedding."

Her countenance expressed such evident satisfaction, that Miss Lavinia grew uneasy.

“My dear,” she exclaimed, anxiously, “do you love Robert enough?”

“Do I love him enough?” cried Mab; “oh, aunt, how can you put the question? Why, I cannot even imagine loving anyone else.”

“Then, my dear child,” faltered Miss Lavinia, in her emotion, “it is as it should be, and you will be the happiest of women.”

“I don’t object, aunt,” saucily replied Mab; “but not just yet.”

But though she looked gay, Mab was troubled at heart, and she thought—“Ah! if uncle were not so far away!”

CHAPTER IX.

MR. FORD was far away, but he was not so far as Mab thought.

The last male representative of the Irish Fords, as they had always been called in the family, had died mad; leaving two twin daughters and a widow, whose second husband was a genuine Celt, named O'Lally. By him Mrs. O'Lally had a son, whose birth she survived but a few weeks; the boy's father died young, and his two sisters, by their mother's first marriage, reared him to man's estate. They were rich and handsome, but they never married; apart from an affection so strong that it made the thought of separation unbearable, Emily and Ellen Ford loved their young brother too fondly to think of depriving him of their inheritance, the only one he had to expect. Was he not an O'Lally, and their brother—the object of

all their pride as well as of their deepest love?

Although the days when these ladies visited the Lancashire Fords, and Emily flirted with Mr. Ford, and Ellen was Lavinia's bosom friend, had long been gone, they were remembered on both sides; and every now and then Miss Ellen and Mr. Ford's sister exchanged letters, and such tokens of affection as the Balbriggan stockings. After residing many years in Dublin for the education of their brother, the Miss Fords returned to their native place in the south west of Ireland, and there purchased an estate from an old friend of their family, a Mr. Gardiner, which estate they at once christened O'Lally's Town, in anticipation, no doubt, of the flourishing aspect it was to take with time. Now it was a desert, and not a house appeared within view of that in which the Miss Fords and Mr. O'Lally resided. They had not been in their new home much more than a month, when Mr. Ford resolved upon taking that journey to America, of which, after recording the commencement, we may now give the close.

The dwelling at O'Lally's Town was a dilapidated old house, large enough to be called a mansion, if its extreme plainness had not forbidden the title. It was a low, long, barn-like building, dark and gloomy in aspect, with few windows, and wide, blank spaces of wall between. It stood on a rocky

shore close by the Atlantic, surrounded by grand and majestic scenery, with which it had nothing in common ; for its utter solitude alone redeemed it from the reproach of commonplace ugliness. Its desolate aspect added to its other drawbacks. O'Lally's Town, as it was now generally called, was anything but a pleasant abode. The rooms were vast and cheerless ; what comfort indeed could abide in those immense chambers, which looked as if furniture would never fill them ? The Miss Fords, too prudent to make the attempt, left the place pretty much as they found it ; they kept the large beds, the massive chairs and tables, which they had purchased with the house and estate from the late owner, and they added little or nothing to these indispensable articles of furniture.

"It will do when our brother marries," observed Miss Emily ; and Miss Ellen, who always acquiesced in her sister's decisions, said so too. As "our brother" was now twenty-three, the contingency, which was to refurnish O'Lally's Town, did not seem a very remote one.

"I wish he would marry Annie Gardiner," said Miss Emily one evening.

Miss Ellen took off her spectacles and looked at her sister.

"Dear me !" she exclaimed, "I never thought of that."

The two sisters were sitting together in a wide, low room on the ground floor, which was the parlour, sitting-room, and drawing-room, too, of the house. It was meagerly furnished, and felt chill, though there burned a bright turf fire on the hearth; for Miss Emily scorned both coals and grate, and would have none but the national fuel. The light of the candle lamp shed a small bright circle on the table near which the two ladies sat working, but left the rest of the large, dreary room in comparative obscurity.

"Of course," said Miss Ellen, "it would be just the thing if he would marry Annie; but do you think he will, Emily?"

Miss Emily gave a little start, and did not answer. The night was stormy and wild, and a great blast of wind now rose moaning around the old house with a dismal lament. And above the wind sounded the fierce roar of the huge sea-waves dashing on the beach.

"It is a dreadful night," said Miss Ellen in a low voice, and, looking round her with a startled face, she added, "Emily, I fear I shall never get used to this house."

"Yes, you will, my dear Ellen, I know you will."

"I suppose so—it is getting calm again, thank God! But, Emily, do you think he will marry Annie?"

Her sister did not answer at once. Miss Ellen none the less anxiously expected her reply. She had been used, from infancy to her present age of forty-five, to rely on Emily's superior will and judgment, and it was one of her habits to question her about future events with as much confidence as if they must inevitably lie within Miss Emily's knowledge. In this consisted the only difference between the twin sisters; both had been very pretty girls, and were still pleasing fair-haired women, of delicate and refined aspect, of gentle manners, genial tempers, and kind hearts; both adored the younger brother whom they had reared, and to whom they had sacrificed youth, beauty, and fortune, without a sigh of regret; but, similar as they were, it was Miss Emily who ruled, and Miss Ellen who obeyed: the shadow of a contest for power had never arisen between them, and never would to the end of time.

"I am sure I don't know," at length reluctantly answered Miss Emily; "but I wish he would—we asked her here for that after her father's death; we thought that seeing her daily he would take a fancy to her, but I am afraid he has not."

"She is very handsome," said Miss Ellen.

"She is, and we thought that might do something."

"We" was a favourite word with Miss Emily. She knew that she did not give her sister Ellen a

fair share in the family councils, and she used the plural pronoun as a delicate compensation. It answered as the Co. of their little firm, and quite satisfied good and humble Miss Ellen.

"I am afraid, I am, that he is fond of Mary O'Flaherty," resumed Miss Emily.

"Don't say so, Emily," cried Ellen, with something like energy. "She is a dear, good girl, but she has not got a farthing."

"Just so," said Emily, knitting her smooth white forehead into a thoughtful wrinkle; "but depend upon it, Ellen, it is to see her he takes those long journeys every now and then. Depend upon it, he is with her now."

Miss Ellen looked frightened and bewildered.

"Then I suppose he will marry her," she said at length.

A long silence followed this remark. Miss Emily continued hemming a handkerchief, but, with as much bitterness as her nature allowed, she thought of the interview now doubtless taking place between her brother and the handsome Mary O'Flaherty. Miss Ellen, on the other hand, the first shock over, looked at the matter with her habitual indulgence and good-humour. Mary was very handsome and kind-hearted and cheerful, and if "our brother" loved her, what more was needed?—he had a right to please himself, of course

he had, the dear boy, only what a dreary night it was for him, with the wind moaning and the sullen Atlantic roaring along the rocky coast. She did hope he was with Mary in that bright, warm, room at her brother's, where Mary herself looked so gay and handsome, with the children around her. And a very pretty picture of comfort and love combined Miss Ellen was fashioning for herself, when the door of the room abruptly opened, and a handsome dark-haired girl, in deep mourning, entered, with pale cheeks and startled looks.

"Annie, what is it?" cried Miss Emily, rising.

"I am afraid there has been a wreck," said Miss Gardiner, agitatedly. "Honour and I have heard cries for help along the coast. It is a very wild night."

Both sisters turned extremely pale and looked ready to faint. They had a nervous dread of the sea, and possessed neither physical nor moral courage to assist them in any emergency.

"What shall we do?" continued Miss Gardiner.

"Shall I send out Michael with lights?"

"No, no, for heaven's sake!" cried Miss Emily, "the lights might be taken for beacons and lead to a wreck—what shall we do?"

For once she looked at her sister for counsel and assistance; but Miss Ellen was too much frightened herself to give any. The most confused images

floated across her brain; she saw ships with torn sails and broken masts, and her beloved brother stood on every deck. So strong was the illusion, that it brought on a violent fit of trembling, which, to Miss Emily's alarm, threatened to become hysterical. The wreck was forgotten in this domestic incident. The two ladies did their best to restore her to calmness, and the two maid-servants came to their assistance. In the distress of the moment a loud knocking at the gate was not heeded, and it had to be repeated twice before Miss Emily said, with a start:

"Michael, go and see what that is. Some one is knocking."

Michael went, but the knocking was renewed ere he reached the door, and Miss Ellen, who was gradually rallying, heard it, and faintly asked, "Who was coming?"

"Doctor Flinn, I dare say," replied Miss Emily, trying to look cheerful. "Yes, I hear his voice. It is Doctor Flinn. There, cheer up, my darling!"

"And what is Doctor Flinn coming for?" asked Miss Ellen, sitting up.

"He will tell us that, darling."

The door of the room opened as she spoke, and a short, stout man, with a round good-natured face, entered the room.

"Welcome, Doctor Flinn!" said Miss Emily,

not seeing, in her eagerness, that he was followed by another person, "here is poor Ellen has been bad again."

"I am well now," said Miss Ellen, "quite well. How are you, Doctor Flinn, have you——"

She stopped short, for behind Doctor Flinn she saw, in the gloom of the open door, a taller man, whose pale face, surrounded by heavy masses of white hair, bent spectral-like towards her.

"Doctor Flinn, who—who is it?" she gasped.

Doctor Flinn laughed heartily.

"Why, your cousin, Mr. John Ford," he said, moving on one side—"your cousin, Miss Nelly, whom I found lost and wandering on this inhospitable shore an hour ago, and whom I brought here safe and sound, though rather wet, I am sorry to say."

The two Miss Fords looked at their cousin in great surprise. They had not seen him for twenty-five years, and almost doubted his identity. No visit could be less expected than was this in their new home. Miss Emily was the first to recover.

"Cousin John," she said, extending her hand, and speaking warmly and cordially, "you are welcome. How are you?"

"Well, thank you, Emily. We have got older since we met."

"We have," a little shortly said Miss Emily,

who did not like to be reminded of the progress of time.

“And the wreck,” here remarked Miss Ellen, looking round, “where is it—where are the others?”

“A wreck!” cried Doctor Flinn—“is there a wreck, then?”

Miss Ellen seemed bewildered.

“I thought there was a wreck,” she said, “and seeing Cousin John so wet——”

“I am wet with rain,” interrupted Mr. Ford. “You did not think I came across the Atlantic, did you, Cousin Ellen?”

Cousin Ellen did not answer, but looked helpless.

“There is no wreck,” said Doctor Flinn. “What put that into your head?”

“We heard shouts,” here observed Miss Gardiner, “and we thought they came from a ship in distress—at least I thought so.”

“And you must needs come and frighten these two poor creatures, with their horror of the sea,” said Doctor Flinn, so sharply that Miss Gardiner coloured. “Mr. Ford had lost his way, and shouted to find it again, and might have wandered till morning, I perceive, if I had not come up. Why don’t you sit by the fire, Mr. Ford, and dry your clothes?—this is not a melting summer night by any means, though it is rather chill than cold.”

"An awful climate!" said Mr. Ford, taking a chair and drawing it close to the fire. "I cannot say I admire your country, Cousin Emily."

"I think it a great pity your countrymen ever did admire it," answered Miss Emily, rather warmly.

"Come, come, no offence meant," said Mr. Ford, holding out a friendly hand, "you know me of old, Emily. I am outspoken, but I mean no harm."

"I am sure you do not, John," said Miss Emily, whose gentle wrath ever melted away, even more rapidly than it awoke; "and you are wet, there is no denying it, no more than the rain; but I am going to cheer you and Doctor Flinn with something Irish which your countrymen appreciate, John."

"Whisky—thank you, Emily! I never touch spirits now."

Miss Emily looked much astonished. A partiality for the bottle, especially for that bottle which contains the more ardent beverage, had always been John's weakness.

He half-smiled and said—

"I shall do very well, thank you. How is your brother?"

"Ah! you may well ask, Mr. Ford. Our brother was in London the other day, and he called on Lavinia, and learned you were travelling."

"How was Mab?" he interrupted.

"She was out; but they were all well. Not with water, John."

"Not with water, thank you."

"Without water, if you please, Miss Emily," here slyly put in Doctor Flinn.

Miss Emily laughed, and gave the requisite orders. In a few minutes Doctor Flinn was tasting what he pronounced "the best restorative in Ireland," whilst Mr. Ford sat by the fire drying his clothes, his hands resting on his knees, his look vaguely fixed on Annie Gardiner, who sat facing him, and who, unable to understand the meaning of so sudden a visit in the wildest part of Ireland, wondered what had brought him.

Some such thought also crossed the minds of Miss Emily and her sister, well pleased though they were to see their cousin; but though he spoke readily and answered all their questions, of his purpose in coming Mr. Ford gave no sort of explanation.

CHAPTER X.

AROUND the dwelling at O'Lally's Town extended a wild but enclosed waste, which the Miss Fords called the garden. Purple hills that met a cloudy sky bounded the prospect beyond the walls. A few shrubs, which the richness of the soil, not the care of man, had rendered luxuriant, were scattered on grassy slopes. Flowers grew here and there, but without either order or beauty, and trees there were none.

As Mr. Ford now took a solitary morning walk in this demesne, he cast a critical eye on all he saw, and came to the conclusion that the late Mr. Gardiner must have had but a poor taste in gardening matters. So total a misuse of nature and her gifts he had never witnessed.

A quick step behind him made him look round. Coming towards him he saw a pale young man,

with dark hair, and bright blue eyes, in whom he at once divined the half-brother of his cousins—Mr. O'Lally.

They exchanged a rapid and searching look before they spoke. Their greeting, though friendly in appearance, was, as each felt cold in reality. But with as much ease as if his life had been spent in the world, Mr. O'Lally at once led his sister's guest into conversation.

"You are admiring the garden," he said, with grave irony—"it is remarkable. But there will be a change a twelvemonth hence. I shall plant trees here, knock down a part of that wall, and have an iron grating, to let in the view, which is splendid. A few alleys shaded by young trees and beds of flowers scattered on that bright green, will make a radical change."

He spoke with a coolness and decision that struck Mr. Ford. They were free from the presumptuous confidence of youth, and had all the quiet power that belong to maturity. Mr. Ford thrust his hands in his pockets and eyed him curiously; but all he said was:

"This place seems to have been dreadfully neglected."

"Do you mean the garden?"

"The house is not in prime condition," replied Mr. Ford with his usual bluntness.

"It is not; but I shall see to that too. However, I shall not do much in the beginning. I have other work in hands—I am building a factory."

"A factory!—it will not answer."

Mr. O'Lally smiled.

"I shall make it answer," he said quietly. "I can get cheap labour."

"Will it be good?" asked Mr. Ford, who secretly scorned the idea of a factory out of Lancashire.

"I shall make it good," still quietly replied Mr. O'Lally. "I mean to make great changes in this part of the country. I shall introduce the commercial element."

He spoke with a calmness that bewildered Mr. Ford.

Mr. O'Lally was twenty-three, and did not look twenty; but he was young, not boyish. His massive forehead, his deep-set eyes, his handsome and clearly-cut features, all spoke of an intellect and a character prematurely developed and ripe for any project.

Mr. Ford's penetration into character was not great; he had more shrewdness than real sagacity, and there was nothing very salient in Mr. O'Lally to give shrewdness fair play. His manners were gentle and pleasing, his tone was mild, his

smile was remarkably sweet and winning. It required a keener eye than Mr. Ford's to detect dangerous symptoms of strength, will, and despotism, under so fair and pleasing an exterior. But Mr. Ford was guarded by an instinct which seems granted to beings of weak judgment as a compensation. He knew that he had come to O'Lally's Town on an errand which required to be concealed, and he felt that the enemy from whom he must especially conceal it was that agreeable smiling young man. From the moment that he met the look of Mr. O'Lally's pleasant but penetrating blue eyes, he had the consciousness that neither directly nor indirectly must he attempt to gain information from him. Mr. O'Lally might answer him—he probably would; but the cost of such replies would assuredly be more than Mr. Ford was willing to pay.

“I must take that old doctor in hand,” thought Mr. Ford, on whom Doctor Flinn's easy and good-natured ways had produced a favourable impression. He came to this conclusion as they turned back to the house where breakfast was waiting, as Mr. O'Lally had told him; and as he walked with his arms folded and his eyes downcast, he was not conscious of Mr. O'Lally's look bent full upon him; a look full of mistrust, and which answered to the impression on Mr. O'Lally's mind:

“That man has a secret he dare not tell, and comes here with an object he is afraid to reveal.”

“Yes, Doctor Flinn will do,” again thought Mr. Ford, as they entered the house together, and to his great satisfaction he heard Doctor Flinn’s loud voice talking in the dining-room to Miss Emily. He had called in to inquire after Miss Ellen, for he was the nearest neighbour of the two ladies, and almost a daily visitor at O’Lally’s Town. He had also, it appeared, something to say to Mr. O’Lally, for he waited until breakfast was over to have a conversation with him.

“Just a word about Mr. Briggs,” he explanatorily added.

Miss Emily looked anxious, Mr. O’Lally smiled, and the two gentlemen walked out together in the garden.

“Cousin John,” said Miss Emily, “come into the next room, if you please.—I want to speak to you.”

Mr. Ford obeyed. His cousin followed him into the room in which he had been received on the preceding evening, and Miss Ellen and Miss Gardiner remained behind. Miss Emily closed the door carefully, and said :

“Take a seat by the fire, John—it is a chill morning, and this is a miserably cold house, and we are going to have a long talk. I know Doctor

Flinn will keep our brother a good while, John," she said, sitting down on the other side of the high and wide chimney piece, and thus facing her cousin, "I want you to advise us. We do not know what to do."

"About your brother?" said Mr. Ford.

"Not exactly about him; but about a young girl with whom he is very much smitten, I am afraid. She is the sister of a rich farmer, who lives thirty miles off. I do not mean to say that Mary O'Flaherty is not a very pretty, pleasing girl, but we do not want her to marry our brother—that is the plain truth of it. Now, I should like to put the case to her in a proper light, but it is awkward, and I thought that you, who are a legal man, might help us."

"Why not argue the matter with your brother," suggested Mr. Ford.

"No, no, that would never do," hastily replied Miss Emily. "We must act on Mary O'Flaherty, and on no one else."

Mr. Ford looked abstracted.

"Who is that Mary O'Flaherty?" he asked; "there was a great heiress of the name, was there not?"

"Oh! she is dead," impatiently replied Miss Emily. "This Mary O'Flaherty, who is her cousin, has nothing—not a farthing—nothing but a pretty face and a good temper."

“And the dead one,” asked Mr. Ford, “where is she?”

Miss Emily stared.

“Buried, I suppose,” she shortly replied.

“But where?”

“Cousin John, you are dreaming. What extraordinary questions you do put! How should I know where the child is buried?”

“Oh! she was a child, then?” persisted Mr. Ford.

“She was a child when our brother met her and her mother in the South of France, and there, I believe, they both died.”

“So Mrs. O’Flaherty died in France,” thoughtfully observed Mr. Ford. “Emily, where did she die?”

“I don’t know,” rather impatiently answered Miss Emily, “I dare say our brother knows, but what have we to do with it all? As I was saying, this Mary O’Flaherty——”

“The dead one?” interrupted Mr. Ford.

“John,” said Miss Emily, leaning back in her chair, “are you well?”

“Quite well,” answered Mr Ford, and he looked perfectly cool and collected.

“Then what do you keep talking of that dead child to me for?” rather hotly asked Miss Emily, “what have we to do with her?”

"She would have been very rich if she had lived," said Mr. Ford, as if this were sufficient explanation—"she would have had thirty thousand pounds, which have gone to the Georges; and she would have had O'Lally's Town too, Cousin Emily, for it was only in consequence of her death Mr. Gardiner stepped into this property."

The tongs which Miss Emily held dropped from her hand.

"Do tell me what you are driving at," she said, a little faintly—"do, John."

"Nothing," he replied, very coolly; "what should I be driving at? I am talking of an old matter which I know well, as those cousins of mine, the Georges, have come into the property. Mary O'Flaherty would have been well off—that is all."

"Well, I hope she is well off. God rest her soul, poor little innocent," rejoined Miss Emily; "and we have purchased O'Lally's Town from Annie's father, for our brother; and if he would make up his mind to marry Annie, who has land close to his, all would be right; but no, it is all Mary O'Flaherty, and he rides thirty miles to see her; and what are we to do, John?"

"Is he so fond of her?"

"Ford! he adores her, and what can we do?"

"Nothing," said Mr. Ford, quietly: "I have

seen enough of Mr. O'Lally to tell you that, if he likes a woman, he will go through fire and water to have her."

Miss Emily looked blank.

"Why, she is poor as Job!" she cried.

"Never mind that—who knows—perhaps Miss Gardiner is not so rich."

He looked very dreamy, and Miss Emily stared at him.

"Why, O'Lally's Town was a handsome estate enough," she said; "and it was only part of her property. Annie is to be what her father was to be—our brother's partner in the factory."

"Have nothing to do with her, Emily; I don't like her eyes—they are not good eyes, Emily."

"They are very handsome eyes, John, and I am really surprised at your remarks."

She looked quite offended; but Mr. Ford persisted in saying he did not like Miss Gardiner's eyes.

"Well, I will tell you what I don't like," hesitatingly replied Miss Emily, lowering her voice; "she walks in her sleep. She does not know it, and we dare not tell her; but Ellen saw her."

"Does she?" said Mr. Ford, looking very little interested; "by-the-bye, Emily, I may as well be open with you—I am short of money just now; you could not lend me five hundred pounds, could you?"

It was with the greatest coolness that Mr. Ford preferred a request so sudden and unexpected that it took Miss Emily's breath away. He saw the impression he had produced, and forced a smile.

"Come, I see it will not do," he said; "never mind, Emily, never mind."

"I am very sorry," deprecatingly said Miss Emily; "and indeed, John, if it were at another time, you should be cordially welcome; but we have just bought this estate, and it is not all paid for yet, for the rest of our money is embarked in the factory. You know how rare freeholds are—we quite jumped at this, and our dear brother is determined to be both an agriculturist and a manufacturer; and of course he will succeed, though I am sorry to say the country is against him. Doctor Flinn quite frightened me about that Mr. Briggs. Oh! John, I do wish he would marry Miss Gardiner—I mean our brother, not Mr. Briggs, of course."

"Never mind about the five hundred pounds," said Mr. Ford, as if this were all he thought of; "I shall manage, I suppose—and if I had suspected your capital was so engaged, I should not have mentioned it."

He rose as he spoke. At the same moment the door opened, and Mr. O'Lally and Doctor Flinn entered the room. Their conference was over, and

Doctor Flinn had come to take his leave of Miss Emily.

"If you will allow it," said Mr. Ford, "I shall walk with you for a while; I should like a look at the country."

Doctor Flinn was too courteous and hospitable an Irishman to say that he was riding and not walking. He expressed himself delighted with the proposal, and out they went together. Doctor Flinn, who was quite at home at O'Lally's Town, signifying to the man-servant, Michael, that he was to precede them with his horse, and wait for them by Shane's river.

"Fine scenery," said Doctor Flinn, pointing to the plain bounded by a rocky shore, and skirted by purple mountains, through which they were passing.

"Is this Mr. O'Lally's land?" asked Mr. Ford.

"I am sorry to say it is."

Mr. Ford looked surprised; Doctor Flinn resumed in a pathetic tone:

"Do, Mr. Ford, advise that misguided young man. He wants to set up a factory. He is building a factory. How he got round that hard, tight-fisted old Gardiner, whom we buried two months back, no one can tell. He did it; and the factory is building, and he and Miss Gardiner are to be partners, and he will ruin the poor girl, and his

poor sisters, two of the kindest, weakest women who ever breathed. Do advise him, Mr. Ford; you are related to them—you are a man of business—you know life; and the boy, the obstinate boy, has no chance; factories do not answer, never will answer in this part of the country.”

“I have already told him so this morning.”

Doctor Flinn’s face fell.

“Oh! you have—have you? Well, I have just been talking with him, and he is as obstinate as ever.”

There was a short silence.

“If it were even only one factory,” gloomily said Doctor Flinn; “but he has the strangest ideas in his head. Would you believe it, Mr. Ford?—he means to compete with Staffordshire! Yes, you may stare. He says that he has discovered on Miss Gardiner’s land—for she has some land adjoining his close to their factory—a large inexhaustible bed of the best porcelain clay. This clay that wise Mr. O’Lally means to turn into cups and saucers made by machinery; and by the use of that machinery, he confidently hopes to drive Staffordshire out of the market. He actually means to have both the home and the export trade—there never was such a dreamer!”

“He will require large capital,” said Mr. Ford.

“Thousands, sir, thousands; but bless you, no—

thing escapes him. He wants to create a watering-place along the coast, and he will have villas where no one ever saw anything but sea-mews. He talks quite plausibly on the subject. I told him that delicate persons would never visit his watering-place, the position being bleak beyond description. 'Bleak!' says he, 'a fir plantation will soon settle that.' And as the side of the mountain happens to be his, he is going to plant it with fir-trees. A misguided young man!"

"Trees take time to grow."

"Of course they do; but that boy does not believe in time. He acts, sir, as if there were no such a thing."

Another silence followed this remark.

"Then he wants to farm too," ruefully resumed Doctor Flinn. "He has got hold of poor Annie's estate, and wants to farm. It is pitiable! He was reared in Dublin, and I do not believe he knows a pig from a cow. He has not the least idea of farming—he cannot, you know."

Mr. Ford looked at the country. If the land was rich and good, what advantage had been taken of its qualities? Doctor Flinn understood the look, and answered it.

"Well, I do not mean to say old Gardiner was a good farmer. He was too stingy, and farming, we all know, requires a generous heart and an

open hand; but this boy will only make bad worse. And then there is Mr. Briggs, the first man in the country; why, he has begun by affronting *him*. You have heard of Mr. Briggs, of course?"

"Never," laconically replied Mr. Ford.

Doctor Flinn looked surprised and almost incredulous, but he had too much innate good-breeding to express the doubts he really felt, and he only said:

"Well, Mr. Briggs is the first man of the country, sir—I might almost say the first man in all Ireland—not that I go with Mr. Briggs in everything, certainly not; he is decidedly bigoted, intolerant, and despotic; but for wealth, position, and power, I—I don't know his second, sir, and to think of that boy flying in his face at the first onset. It is pitiable! And then those two poor sisters, your cousins, are so infatuated about him, that they will throw away every shilling they have to please him; and he, though he adores them, will ruin them to give them, as he thinks, a fortune. It is a dreadful business, sir, and if you would interfere and advise, it would be a charity."

Mr. Ford thought it odd that all Mr. O'Lally's friends applied to him for assistance, and he concluded, naturally enough, that the young man, with all his smiles and his pleasant looks, must be tolerably obstinate and unyielding. But he, too,

had an object in view, and this made him patient. Perhaps Doctor Flinn could assist him.

"I shall see what I can do," he said, "though I have no great hopes—but I came to Ireland on a professional matter, in which you may assist me. Did you happen to know, ten or twelve years back, an extravagant young fellow named Barry?"

"I knew two: one who was drowned in Shane's river, and his brother who died in France with his widowed sister, a Mrs. O'Flaherty."

"Indeed! and did they leave any children—were they married?"

"Not that I know of."

"It is a curious case," confidentially said Mr. Ford, looking hard at Doctor Flinn. "If either of these Barrys had left a male heir, that boy would now be entitled to a handsome English property."

Doctor Flinn looked surprised and incredulous, and asked, "How so?"

"To tell you the truth, I would rather not enter into particulars," hesitatingly replied Mr. Ford, "I might have half the Barrys in Ireland about my ears; besides, the secret is none of mine, and the person who has the property now, though anxious to feel certain of a legal title to it, is by no means desirous of fostering idle and vexatious claims, you understand."

"You are quite safe with me," replied Doctor

Flinn; "and these Barrys were not married, I believe; but suppose there was a private marriage?"

Mr. Ford looked blank.

"I never thought of it," he exclaimed, stopping short.

Doctor Flinn put his finger to his nose and winked.

"I was bred to the law," he said, looking shrewd, "and though I left it for medicine, I know a secret or two."

"What shall I do?" said Mr. Ford.

"I shall help you, sir—I shall help you. I shall inquire. I shall ascertain whether the Barry who was drowned carried out a love affair of his with a farmer's daughter."

"And the other one," suggested Mr. Ford—"the one who died in France."

"Oh! he was safe enough, poor fellow."

But it was precisely about that Barry Mr. Ford seemed most anxious. Was it sure that he was dead—and if so, where did he die?"

"I will not hide from you," he added, impressively, "that this is a very important matter, requiring the greatest care and delicacy. There is more than mere money at stake—you understand?"

"Quite well—I shall be as secretive as you can wish."

"I have not mentioned a word to my cousins,"

continued Mr. Ford—"they are dear good creatures, but they are women."

"Just so," said Doctor Flinn, who had never married, and whom his sister, Miss Flinn, ruled and led completely. "I approve your caution. And now, as this is a matter of business, tell me candidly all you want me to do for you."

"Since you are so very kind," rather eagerly replied Mr. Ford, "I will take you at your word, and request you to favour me with every scrap of information you can get about these Barrys, and especially about the one who died in France. I need not tell a person familiar as you are with the workings of the law, that facts, apparently the most remote from a main object, can be turned to a good account."

"Of course," replied Doctor Flinn; "and here we part, for here is Shane's river, and there is Michael holding my horse, and in a day or two I shall have procured for you all the information you can get in this part of the country."

They had reached a shining little river flowing gently within the shadow of steep mountains and vanishing in a romantic glen. It was a beautiful spot—wild and lonely.

"Is this, too, part of the O'Lally's Town estate?" asked Mr. Ford.

"Of course it is; a very pretty little of property

that young O'Lally has got there. Well, good-bye. We shall soon meet, you know."

There they parted. Doctor Flinn pleasurably excited at the thought of being mixed up in a matter in which property and character were at stake, and Mr. Ford sad, ashamed, and worn at the part he had been playing.

CHAPTER XI.

THE next day was Sunday.

Mr. Ford had never thought of it till Miss Emily regretted at breakfast that the jaunting car had got damaged, and was not mended yet.

"But, luckily, the chapel is not far, and the day is fine," she added. "Of course, you can walk two miles, Cousin John?"

"Oh! of course I can," replied Mr. Ford, reddening uneasily.

Since his wife's death he had not entered a church or a chapel. He had been careful in deputing Miss Lavinia to attend to the religious instruction of his family, but example they had never had from him. Why he abstained from all the outward forms of religion he had never said, and Mab herself had not dared to question him on this subject—a sensitive one, she felt.

But shame and worldly propriety now conquered Mr. Ford. He was prepared with no excuse, and could not decently stay within.

The day was fine; the walk was not, as Miss Emily said, a long one. It took them through the open country, and as Mr. O'Lally remained with his sister's cousin, and pertinaciously walked by his side, Mr. Ford, who had had wild thoughts of lingering behind and making his escape, was compelled to walk on and listen. Mr. O'Lally entertained him with an account of the country, which did not seem a flattered one, and with the alterations he meant to effect—and these struck Mr. Ford as rather sweeping as well as numerous.

"And do you expect no opposition?" he said, interested, in spite of other thoughts, in the bold young man's plans.

Mr. O'Lally smiled.

"Plenty," he said; and he resumed his discourse and his projects.

The chapel was reached at length.

Mr. Ford stared, amazed on beholding it. He saw a low, miserable, barnlike building. He looked inquiringly at Mr. O'Lally.

"Come again and look at it a year hence," said the young man, and he stepped back to let Mr. Ford enter.

The interior of the building corresponded to its

external appearance. It was poor, bare, and scarcely decent. Extreme poverty and some neglect were marked in all Mr. Ford saw. But perhaps he did not think of that. They were kneeling and praying. He stood, and could not pray. In the early ages of the Church great sinners were forbidden the sanctuary for days, sometimes for years. The murderer, the thief, the libertine were held unworthy, unfit to enter the temple of the living God, unfit to mingle with the faithful within. They might stay without, under the wide porch made wide for them, but they were not to pass the sacred threshold. That barrier of stone which was between them and adoration did not exist for Mr. Ford. The old times were gone, and, besides, who knew his sin?—who could dare and tax him with it? No one. But conscience, though often silent, is often inexorable. She had decreed that John Ford should know peace no more; that the terrors of the other world should haunt him in this, and rob him of the last refuge of the penitent sinner—prayer.

He could not pray—and he could not bear to be where prayers arose from the heart. He looked at his cousins, at Annie Gardiner, at Mr. O'Lally—all reverently bending and absorbed in devotion; he thought that his children, Mab, and his sister were thus engaged at the same hour; unutterable bitter-

ness filled his heart, and turning away abruptly, he left the place and walked home.

The way of the family to the house lay through the garden, and there, on their return, they found Mr. Ford. He was walking with his hands in his pockets, kicking the gravel in the path. He looked up as they approached, and his look was both sheepish and defiant.

"Why, cousin, were you unwell?" cried Miss Emily.

"The place was close," carelessly said Mr. Ford, "and I thought a walk home would do me good."

It was a strange excuse. Wind and rain had but too free an admittance into the poor chapel which Mr. Ford had left so abruptly.

"Close!" said Miss Ellen, amazed.

Her sister pressed her arm gently, and checked the rest. Mr. O'Lally said nothing, but Mr. Ford felt his penetrating eyes observing him quietly.

This incident did what slight incidents often do when the circle in which they occur is a limited one; it chilled its members for the rest of the day. The sisters spoke little; they went to the chapel again in the afternoon, and Mr. Ford alone remained within. It was tacitly felt the chapel would be as close in the evening as it had been in the morning. After dinner Mr. Ford complained

of a headache, and thought a walk would do him good. His cousins warmly encouraged him to take one, and Mr. Ford accordingly went out.

He had ascertained during the day that Doctor Flinn's residence was not very far off, and taking the path through the fields that led to it, Mr. Ford now made his way to that gentleman's abode. The long twilight was not yet over when he reached the cottage of Doctor Flinn, whom he found sauntering slowly in a small garden crammed with flowers. They smelt very sweet, to Mr. Ford's taste, indeed, there was rather too much of them, but Doctor Flinn was very proud of their beauty, and exclaiming cordially :

"Glad you found me out, Mr. Ford," he hastened to add, "what do you think of my roses?"

"They are very fine, Doctor Flinn."

"Fine! they are splendid. Well, I am glad you came; Miss Flinn will give you a cup of tea, and I have something to tell you; I shall walk home with you—you understand. Come in and see Miss Flinn."

Mr. Ford would rather there had been no such person as Miss Flinn just then; but not being able to prevent her existence, he submitted to it, and entered the parlour where Miss Flinn now sat reading.

Miss Flinn was a woman of fifty. She had a brown, good-humoured face, shrewd and keen, a ready tongue, and her share of ready wit. She had read prodigiously, and seen very little, and the result was an extraordinary compound of breadth and narrowness. She had strong and violent prejudices, which she nursed up carefully as so many virtues, and a habit of putting down people, which, though no doubt pleasant to herself, was not equally so to her friends, and caused Miss Flinn to lead rather a solitary life. Mr. Ford, being a stranger, she spared him on this their first interview, but she was not equally lenient to the members of the little circle he had left.

“Well, it must be a relief to you to leave that old O’Lally’s Town,” she said, giving him a keen look, “those two silly women have pledged themselves to Miss Gardiner, to see no one whilst she is on a mourning visit to them, and it is a stupid place, if ever there was one.”

“Mr. Ford has come to take a cup of tea with us,” put in Doctor Flinn.

“Now, Doctor Flinn, don’t talk so; Mr. Ford has come because he was sick of his life there. Emily and Ellen are two poor creatures, and their brother is in love——”

Doctor Flinn coughed uneasily.

“Nonsense,” said his sister, “he is in love, and

though I don't think Mary O'Flaherty worthy of him, she is much a nicer girl than that sullen Annie. It will not do; they may throw them together—silly women!—it will not do."

It was in vain for Doctor Flinn to give Miss Flinn imploring looks, Miss Flinn was bent on talking—and talk she did, until Mr. Ford grew rather impatient. Doctor Flinn had something to tell him, something which he (Mr. Ford) was longing to know, and which rendered him very reckless of Miss Flinn's eloquence or of Mr. O'Lally's love affairs. Scarcely was tea over, when, under the excellent pretence that his cousins would sit up for him, Mr. Ford took his leave. Miss Flinn, who did not often get the chance of a listener, pressed him in vain to stay. Mr. Ford would go, and he went, and Doctor Flinn said he would walk part of the way with him.

Now, if Doctor Flinn was proud of his roses, he was infinitely prouder of Miss Flinn, and

"What do you think of Miss Flinn?" were his first words as soon as they were out of the house. "A remarkable woman, Mr. Ford, but lost here—quite lost and wasted. *I* don't know a woman like Miss Flinn!"

"Nor do I," answered Mr. Ford, drily.

"Of course you do not—no one does. Fine evening."

It was a fine evening—mild, but dark; stars shone in the depths of the sky, but the moon gave no light.

Mr. Ford for one was glad of it; for he felt his features were not under his control, and might betray him, even to Doctor Flinn's not very penetrating glance.

"Fine evening," said Doctor Flinn, again.

"Yes, a fine evening," vaguely replied Mr. Ford.

"Not that we can see much of the country, eh?" continued Doctor Flinn, jocularly.

Mr. Ford was on thorns at all this delay.

"Well," resumed Doctor Flinn, "have you found out anything?"

"About the Barrys?" suggested Mr. Ford, with trembling eagerness.

"Of course. About the Barrys."

"No—nothing; I did not like to inquire, you know."

"Ha, ha! Did not like to inquire. And I suppose you did not guess you were in the very focus of information, if I may so speak."

"Indeed!" faltered Mr. Ford.

"Why, where did you think I went looking for knowledge?" asked Doctor Flinn. "Eh! now just guess."

"I am sure I don't know," hesitatingly said Mr. Ford; "in the neighbourhood, of course."

"In the neighbourhood!" echoed Doctor Flinn; "there's a guess for you. Why, I went to O'Lally's Town, to be sure. To O'Lally's Town, of course."

"O'Lally's Town!" repeated Mr. Ford, apparently much surprised.

"Of course. Who should give me information but Mr. O'Lally! To think that you were under the same roof with the young man who knows most about the Barrys, and that you never suspected it."

Mr. Ford murmured, "It was very strange!"

"Strange, sir! It is one of those coincidences which novelists dare not use in fiction, but which occur daily in actual matter-of-fact life."

"And you learned something?" said Mr. Ford.

"I did this very day. And now, to begin at the beginning. Those Barrys were of an old but impoverished family. There were three of them, two boys and a girl. The men never married, at least it is said so: their sister became a Mrs. O'Flaherty, and was left a young widow with an only child, a girl, you understand."

"I do."

"Well, the elder Barry remained in Ireland, and lived hard till he got drowned in Shane's river. There was a love affair between him and a farmer's daughter—but, mind me, she married before his death."

"Then of course he was not married to her."

"Of course not. And now for the younger Barry. He was delicate, consumptive, in short, and went to the south of France with his sister and her child, and in that country both his sister and himself died within one year. Strange, eh?"

"Yes, very singular."

"Well, not so singular. They were all consumptive, you see. But what is strange, sir, is, that young Mr. O'Lally should have been with them a short time before their decease took place."

"That is very odd," said Mr. Ford; "and what does he know about them?"

"Plenty. He was a boy travelling with his uncle, when they met that Barry and his sister at Montpellier. They were with them for some time travelling together, and little Mary O'Flaherty—I suppose you know who she was?"

"No—I do not; that is to say, I have heard about her," stammered Mr. Ford.

"Why, she was a great heiress, but no one knew anything about that then. Well, she took a great fancy to young O'Lally, and was always in his arms or on his back, and, as I said, the two families travelled together until young Barry was taken alarmingly ill, and died suddenly."

"Where?" eagerly asked Mr. Ford.

"At Cannes, and there he is buried; and,

you may rely upon it, he was never married."

"At Cannes!" said Mr. Ford; "and it was there that Mrs. O'Flaherty died, was it not?"

"Oh! no."

"What! she did not die at Cannes?"

"She did not. And what has her death to do with the matter?" asked Doctor Flinn, surprised.

"She had no claim on the property, had she?"

"No—not that I know of—besides, is she dead?"

"Of course she is; did I not tell you they all three died, young Barry, his sister and her child—a consumptive lot. It was no bad chance for old Gardiner, though, for he came into O'Lally's Town through that child's death. It is a pity he is not living, he could give us some particulars about Barry, not that I think there is anything material to learn."

Doctor Flinn paused, expecting thanks and praise. He got neither. Mr. Ford walked silently by his side; drops of perspiration stood on his forehead. He had been striving for this useless information, in the hope that a grain of precious truth might mingle with it: and now he was no better off than at the very beginning; and direct questions, from which he shrank with the consciousness of guilty knowledge, seemed his only course—that or silence. At length he took courage.

"Doctor Flinn," he said, "you quite took me by

surprise in mentioning Mr. Gardiner's name. You do not mean to say he was related to the Barrys?"

"Oh! there is no fear about him! He was only related to them by the mother's side. The death of little Mary O'Flaherty was a godsend to him, but he could have no claim."

"And was he with young Barry when he died?"

"Certainly not. He went and fetched the child after the mother's death, and took her to England, where she died, but he was not with young Barry."

"Is it certain?" asked Mr. Ford; "he might have been with him—you know such strange things happen."

"And what if he was, you would not question a dead man—would you?" impatiently asked Mr. Flinn.

Mr. Ford tried to laugh.

"Very good," he said, "very good. But he went and fetched the child—you grant that."

"Then it is about the child you are anxious, and not Barry?" suspiciously said Doctor Flinn.

Mr. Ford was dreadfully alarmed. But he tried to say calmly—

"No, the child could have nothing to do with this—nothing whatever. You are quite right. And, indeed, your penetration has been of most valuable assistance to me."

"Why, you see, I was bred to the law," complacently replied Doctor Flinn; "and, as you will not mention it, of course, I do not mind telling you that there were some very extraordinary stories about that child and old Gardiner at the time. He went and fetched her in France, where her mother died, and took her to England, and came back here without her; and some time after that came the news of her death, and he was next heir to the estate. Many people did not like that."

"What name had he?"

"Not a bad one; yet no one trusted him. He was never found out; but he was always suspected. He was a tall, handsome man with silent dark eyes; his daughter has got them, and I don't know if you have noticed that they are handsome, but by no means pleasant eyes."

"Very true," said Mr. Ford, "now you mention it, I am quite struck with it. They are decidedly unpleasant eyes."

"Of course they are; but that is not all. I now come to the kernel of this matter. You asked a while ago where Mrs. O'Flaherty died. Now, sir, it is most extraordinary, though no less certain, that to this day no one knows where she did die. She was not on good terms with either her own friends or her husband's, and they made no inquiries, and old Gardiner volunteered no information, and he

was not a man whom people questioned, and so no one ever knew it. The child died in England, and he was ready enough to give proof of that, as indeed he was compelled to do by law, I believe ; but about the poor mother's death it was noticed he was always silent. Very strange, is it not ?”

Mr. Ford remained thunderstruck.

“Do you mean to say no one knows where that lady died ?” he exclaimed at length.

“That is just my meaning. A strange thing, sir—a strange thing !”

Mr. Ford could not answer one word. Alas ! he saw it all now. His labour was vain, and to all appearance must ever remain so. His own exertions for years, and latterly Captain George's apparently open confessions, had put him in possession of the whole story ; only one link was wanting, but it was the first. He did not know where Mrs. O'Flaherty died, and when Mr. Gardiner had received the child. That this fact concealed some carefully hidden discrepancy in that child's subsequent story Mr. Ford was morally certain ; but what availed certainty where there was not the shadow of proof ? The Georges could prove her birth and her death ; how could he even prove that she had been left at his door ? The conviction that he had been duped once more by his old enemy—that he had lavished on him some of Mab's money for informa-

tion which when gained only led him into further expense, exasperated Mr. Ford, not a patient man by nature. It was well for him that the darkness of the night concealed the angry agitation of his features, that Doctor Flinn could not see his quivering lips and his flashing eyes, for he might scarcely have been able to subdue those symptoms of his irritation and disappointment.

"Well, what do you say to that story?" asked Doctor Flinn, surprised, and not well pleased at Mr. Ford's long silence.

"I say that old Gardiner was a villain," replied Mr. Ford, with vehement indignation—"a villain, and the accomplice of villains like himself."

"Good heavens, man!" cried Doctor Flinn, much alarmed, "you are not going to take away that poor dead man's character, because I repeated to you in strict confidence—mind, in strict confidence—mere rumours—mere idle rumours! Sir! —a villain! Why, sir, there was not a more honest man breathing than that old Gardiner; a pious, charitable man as any ever lived!—and, for God's sake, sir, don't go and blab at O'Lally's Town!"

This pathetic adjuration helped Mr. Ford to recover his self-possession.

"Don't be afraid," he said, "Gardiner and O'Flaherty are all one to me. I know what I wanted to know, and I am much obliged to you

for the information you were kind enough to procure me. It is very valuable, I assure you—very valuable—especially when obtained thus discreetly—for of course Mr. O’Lally never suspected the real cause of your inquiries?”

“He suspect! I threw him off the scent, sir—I threw him off the scent. Ha! ha! I knew how to manage. I never mentioned Barry’s name. I only brought up the story of the O’Flahertys, and there are reasons why that name sounds very pleasantly in his ears just now. He was quite communicative—told me all about Mrs. O’Flaherty, and was full of little Mary—they were sworn friends, it seems; but I never mentioned Barry, I let him come, sir—I let him come.”

“I am much obliged to you, Doctor Flinn,” said Mr. Ford, “but I am quite ashamed to have brought you so far out of your way. Why, we are near the house!”

“So we are, and I must not go in—good night.”

They shook hands and parted. Doctor Flinn, elated at having got Mr. Ford such valuable information, Mr. Ford depressed to find his journey fruitless. He stood looking at the dark front of the old dwelling, listening to the vague murmurs of the invisible sea, and thinking of Mab. Suddenly a light appeared in a window of the long, low range of the house. Mr. Ford had only time

to see that it was on the first floor, and to recognize the tall and slender figure of Miss Gardiner, when the light vanished.

“That was the third window,” he thought, “and the third window is in Mr. O’Lally’s study, and that is next to my room. What are they doing there? Transacting business?—wait a while—it is not over yet, Miss Gardiner.”

In this resentful mood Mr. Ford entered the house. He found his cousins in the sitting-room, and, to his surprise, Mr. O’Lally was with them.

“How is your headache, John?” asked Miss Emily.

“Very bad,” replied Mr. Ford, “I think I shall bid you good-night and go to bed.”

“Ay, do; poor Annie’s head was so bad, too, that she was obliged to go to bed an hour ago.”

Mr. Ford’s lips opened to say that he had just seen her in Mr. O’Lally’s study, but he checked the impulse, for, after all, it might be a servant; and again saying that his head was very bad, he went up-stairs to his room. This was a very dreary apartment on the first floor. It was large, gloomy, and scarcely furnished. Mr. Ford, who was chilly, had asked to have a fire in it; the turf was now crumbling away in red fragments. He sat down, and, looking at it dreamily, meditated

over the failure of all his plans. "I'll go to France," he thought, rallying a little; "she died there, she was buried there, and there must be traces of her death and burial." As Mr. Ford came to this conclusion, he heard a slight—a very slight—noise on the landing. It might have escaped many a hearing, but his was naturally of the keenest. At once he blew out the light burning on the table near him, and, rising softly, he stealthily approached the door; through its ill-joined chinks several bright gleams of light shot in upon him. Mr. Ford softly opened his door and looked out. The door of Mr. O'Lally's study faced his, and, standing on the threshold of that apartment, appeared Annie Gardiner. She held a lighted wax candle in her right hand. She was pale as death, and her eyes were fixed straight before her, with a cold rigid look. Mr. Ford came forward:

"Miss Gardiner," he asked quietly, "has anything happened?"

She did not answer him. She did not start nor betray any token of recognition, though she passed so close to him that her dark skirts brushed him. She went up the gloomy staircase, steadily holding the light, which shone full on her white face, and never once looking right or left. Mr. Ford watched her until she vanished. A while afterwards he

heard a door on the second floor open and close again—then all was still. He softly stole downstairs and listened; Mr. O’Lally was still talking below with his sisters; it was not to speak to him, then, that Miss Gardiner had entered his study.

“And she had a light, too,” thought Mr. Ford, “very odd—very odd, Miss Gardiner!”

He was going to enter his room, when he suddenly changed his mind and entered that facing it, which was also that which Miss Gardiner had just left. It was a large bare room, not yet fitted up. A bright fire burned on the hearth, and by its light Mr. Ford saw an old Japanned bureau and a deep leather chair facing it. In this chair he sat down, wondering whether he should go and tell Mr. O’Lally what he had seen, or keep his own counsel, for a time at least.

“I think I had better wait,” he thought—“I really think I had; perhaps she does walk in her sleep, after all.”

Mr. Ford had not much time to perplex himself with this question, for suddenly, though noiselessly, the door opened, and a dark figure entered. It was Annie; he knew her by her height, but this time she carried no light. She seemed to need none. She walked straight to the fireplace, knelt on the hearth, and thrust a paper in the fire. A flame shot up and sent a flickering light in the

wide, dark room. A dull, red glow fell on the young girl's pale and rigid face; her eyes were fixed and cold; there was no meaning in her parted lips, marble had more life than Annie Gardiner then. Mr. Ford watched her with breathless attention; he felt convinced that she was acting no part, and he could not check a sort of awe. Suddenly she rose, walked to the door with a firm, sure step—opened it, and closing it again, turned the key outside, and locked Mr. Ford in.

He was too much taken by surprise to overtake or prevent her in time. When he left his chair and sprang to the door, it was fast. He shook it angrily, and, in doing so, ascertained that if there was a key outside there was another key within. He turned it, the door opened, and he stood on the dark and silent landing. He leaned over the banister and listened intently. He still heard voices talking below; above, the house was still as death.

"Mr. O'Lally shall know this to-morrow morning," thought Mr. Ford, perplexed and indignant.

In the meanwhile, he went back to his room, but he could not sleep until morning dawned in the sky; then he fell into heavy slumbers, full of troubled dreams.

CHAPTER XII.

LATE though it was when he fell asleep, Mr. Ford awoke early. He dressed quickly, and leaving his room, at once went to Mr. O'Lally's, situated on the same floor. The house was wide though low, and every floor had a suite of large gloomy chambers. The ladies, who were timorous, slept upstairs, but Mr. O'Lally's study and bedroom were on the first floor, near Mr. Ford's apartment. Mr. O'Lally had long been up, and he answered Mr. Ford's knock by a brief "Come in." He looked surprised to see him, however. In his blunt way Mr. Ford said :

"May I speak to you. I have something to tell you."

He took a chair, sat down, and began at once.

"Does Miss Gardiner really walk in her sleep?"

"She does ; but may I know why you ask ?"

"Because I met her coming out of your study last night."

Mr. O'Lally knit his forehead and said—

"Indeed !"

"Yes, and that is not all. I thought I would just enter the room she had left. I had not been there five minutes when the door opened—she came in again, went to the fireplace, burned some papers, and walked out, locking me in. There was a key inside, however, so I could get out. I looked, but Miss Gardiner had vanished."

Mr. O'Lally smiled incredulously.

"And she was asleep ?" he said.

"I don't know," drily replied Mr. Ford. "The first time she had a candle, and she looked pale and rigid, the second time she had none."

Mr. O'Lally looked more incredulous than before.

"She does walk in her sleep," he said, "but are you sure it was Miss Gardiner whom you saw ?"

Mr. Ford stared and replied rather shortly—

"I saw her as I see you ; it was she, and no other. And now allow me too to put a question. Were there any papers in your study Miss Gardiner could take or destroy ?"

Mr. O'Lally did not answer this.

"My study was her father's room," he said,

coldly; "hence, I suppose, why she visits it in her sleep."

"She came to burn something in it," persisted Mr. Ford.

"Let us see," said Mr. O'Lally.

He opened the door, crossed the landing, and entered the study, followed by Mr. Ford, who, looking curiously around him, at once detected a square letter with a red seal on the floor. He picked it up and handed it to Mr. O'Lally, and as he did so his eye caught the name written upon it—"Miss O'Flaherty." Mr. O'Lally took it, turned it round, put it in his pocket, and opened the bureau. It held nothing but a small packet of letters, which Mr. O'Lally took and counted.

"Everything is as I left it," he said.

"What can she have burned!" exclaimed Mr. Ford, evidently disappointed.

Mr. O'Lally glanced at the fireplace. He could see no trace of anything having been burned in it save turf. Not the least shrivelled scroll remained in the ashes; and though he did not say so, he began to suspect that Mr. Ford had dreamed or invented the whole story.

"I cannot understand it," significantly said Mr. Ford.

"Nor can I," as significantly replied Mr. O'Lally.

It was now breakfast time, and they went down to a very bare room, which was called the dining-room, and in which they found the twin sisters.

Miss Gardiner's place was vacant.

"Where is Annie?" asked Mr. O'Lally, sitting down.

"I don't know," replied Miss Emily. "I wonder what ails her. She is never so late."

The door opened as she spoke, and Miss Gardiner entered. They were all struck with her pallor.

"My dear," cried Miss Ellen, "are you unwell?"

"I am not very well," replied Miss Gardiner, in a low voice, "but nothing particular ails me."

She sat down as she spoke, and drank the tea Miss Emily had silently poured out; but her trembling hand could scarcely raise the cup to her lips. Mr. O'Lally looked at her compassionately; her eyes were wild, her features had nervous twitchings. Ay, she was very unwell indeed!

"What *is* the matter?" cried Miss Ellen.

"Nothing, indeed," answered Miss Gardiner, endeavouring to look composed. "I had a dreadful dream, that was all."

It was plain she would give them no further explanation, for when Miss Ellen curiously said, "A dream! oh! do tell it us, my dear!" Miss Gardiner shivered slightly, and replied, "Pray do not ask. It is still too vivid."

Mr. O'Lally rose as soon as breakfast was over, and went out into the garden. He had not walked far, when he heard a light step running behind him; he looked round and saw Annie; she signed him to stop, and he did so at once.

"I must speak to you a few minutes," she said, as she came up to him, still panting for breath.

"Would you not rather sit than walk?" kindly asked Mr. O'Lally.

"No, thank you."

"Well, but take my arm at least."

She passed her arm through his, and looked fixedly at him, whilst her eyes fast filled with tears, but she did not speak.

"What is it?" he asked gently, "is it the dream?"

"That and other things," she answered sadly; but, shaking her tears away, she resumed, "I have never been happy, as you know, and sometimes the old bitterness will arise; for if I suffered formerly, now I am alone."

"You need not remain so," said Mr. O'Lally, with a smile; "I need not tell you that no young and handsome woman, who is rich as well as handsome, need remain alone. Do as I am going to do, Annie—marry."

"I dare say I shall in time," calmly answered Miss Gardiner; "but if you have found a Mary

O'Flaherty, I have found no one. Believe me, however, I rejoice at your better fortune, and wish you both every happiness."

She spoke in a low tone, with downcast eyes, but with perfect composure.

"And the dream?" said Mr. O'Lally.

"It was not a dream," she whispered; "trust me with nothing—I have lost the five hundred pounds you gave me on Saturday—I missed them this morning, and, what is worse, Mr. O'Lally, I have not the least suspicion how I did lose them."

Mr. O'Lally was startled. Was Mr. Ford's story true, after all? But he could not tell Annie that she walked in her sleep. She did not know it—she was never to know it.

"Where had you put the notes?" he asked.

"In my desk; and here is the key, which never leaves me."

She showed him a small plain key, by no means a safe one, suspended to her jet chain. A terrible suspicion, involuntary and keen, crossed Mr. O'Lally's mind. How could those notes have vanished? Was it for that Mr. Ford came home from the chapel—was it for that he told that strange story of Annie's visit to his study? He had always suspected that man; had he cause so good and cogent for his suspicion? He questioned Miss Gardiner closely, but he could learn nothing

from her, save that she put the notes in her desk on the Saturday and did not open it till this morning, when she at once missed them.

"Never mind," cheerfully said Mr. O'Lally, "the notes are not lost, they are only astray; and now excuse me, I remember something I want to say to Emily."

Miss Gardiner remained in the garden. Mr. O'Lally, with whom suspicion never tarried, went in at once to seek his sister. He found her in the dining-room, alone and thoughtful.

"I am very anxious about Annie," she said; "that dream of hers must have been dreadful. Dreams affect one so; besides, Annie has been in a very excitable state of late. Have you not noticed it?"

Mr. O'Lally replied that he had, and, looking round, inquired where Mr. Ford was.

"I don't know—in his room, I believe. Do you want him?"

"I only wanted to know whether he was within hearing."

"My dear brother!"

"Emily, I must be honest with you—I mistrust Mr. Ford."

"My dear brother!"

"Now just tell me this, Emily, has he attempted to borrow money from you?"

Miss Emily reddened.

"He has, but surely there is no harm in that. It seems, poor fellow, he is hard pushed, and that he came here hoping we could let him have five hundred pounds."

"Five hundred!"

"It is a large sum; but I believe we have the name of being rich. However, when I explained to him it was impossible, he understood at once, and said no more on the subject."

"I put the question," resumed Mr. O'Lally, "not out of curiosity, but because I am sorry to say that Mr. Ford has not the name of a safe man. I have met Mr. George, his eldest son's employer, and though he grew suddenly cautious on learning that I was connected with Mr. Ford through you, he had said enough to make me feel uneasy. And then, what is his domestic history? What was his wife? I heard—I hope it is not true—that she died of a broken heart, and that the child whom he found at his door is strongly suspected to be his."

"His wife," answered Miss Emily, a little warmly, "was a proud, cold beauty, whom I never liked, and I do not think, my dear brother, that she had a heart to break. As to the child, I trust and hope he took her in out of pure Christian charity."

"I hope so too," calmly rejoined her brother;

“and whether he did or not, that is no business of ours; but mind my words, Emily, that man has come here, and is staying here for a purpose that is not friendly.”

Miss Emily looked almost frightened, and, turning to her brother, seemed to ask for an explanation, but Mr. O’Lally gave her none. He had said as much as he wished to say on this subject, and having said it, he left her.

“It is he who has them,” he thought, as he returned to the garden. He hoped to find Annie there, but instead of her he met Mr. Ford, who was lying in wait for him. He was lounging in one of the alleys, his hands thrust in his pockets, his eyes wandering carelessly around him. On seeing Mr. O’Lally, he stopped and stood waiting till the young man came up; he then walked by his side, and said a little eagerly:

“Well—it is odd—is it not?”

“What is odd?” asked Mr. O’Lally.

“Miss Gardiner’s dream.”

“She did not tell it.”

“Just so. She did not tell it.”

“And what is your inference?” asked Mr. O’Lally, stopping short.

“That she was not ready with a dream,” shrewdly replied Mr. Ford.

Mr. O’Lally looked thoughtful. Mr. Ford

could not keep in his triumph at his own sagacity.

"You see," he said, "I am up to all those things. It is very difficult to deceive me, and they who did it once," he added, as a resentful memory of the past shot across his mind, "may repent it ere they die. Now, are you sure you have lost no papers, no valuables?"

"I have already told you so. Excuse me if I walk on fast—I am in a hurry."

"Oh! I can keep up with you," replied Mr. Ford, who had no suspicion that Mr. O'Lally wanted to get rid of him.

"I confess this matter interests me greatly—I should like to help you to fathom it." Mr. O'Lally could scarcely keep in. "I watched her during breakfast time," continued Mr. Ford, absorbed in his own cogitations, "and she looked conscious and unhappy. Now, I have had plenty of experience, and I know that persons who walk in their sleep never do remember what has passed."

Mr. O'Lally bit his lip. Mr. Ford's impudence or his penetration was getting very troublesome. He was glad to find, however, that they had reached the end of the garden, and that his companion showed no inclination to accompany him further. Indeed, Mr. Ford took care, as they parted, to inform him that he would remain at home all day on the watch.

"That man is either a villain or a fool!" indignantly thought Mr. O'Lally. "Who can believe his wild story of Annie walking in her sleep with a candle in her hand, leaving my study, coming back to it, burning papers and the rest. He has stolen her five hundred pounds, wants me to think they are destroyed, and does not know what to invent."

He rapidly matured his plans as he walked on, and, by coming home to luncheon, with him an unusual occurrence, he gave them prompt execution.

"My dear brother, does your head ache?" asked Miss Emily, struck with the gravity of his looks, and using the boldest form of questioning she could venture to employ with her brother.

"No, thank you," he replied; "but I have had a loss."

"A loss!"

The two sisters at once looked anxious.

"Yes. I miss five hundred pounds in notes."

Miss Emily looked aghast.

"You have been robbed?" she cried.

"I do not say so; but the notes are astray. However, I know the numbers, and have taken every necessary step; for they might fall into the wrong hands, you know."

He looked at Mr. Ford keenly, but without affec-

tation. Mr. Ford did not heed the look; his shrewd brown eyes were fastened full on Annie Gardiner, who could scarcely conceal her agitation.

"And is it here the notes are astray?" timidly asked Miss Ellen; "I mean in this house? Because we might look, you know."

Mr. O'Lally smiled.

"The notes may be in this house," he said; "but it is useless for you to look, my dear Ellen; they cannot be where you would seek."

Miss Ellen ventured to say no more, and there the matter ended. When luncheon was over the ladies rose and left the room, a useless ceremonial; Mr. O'Lally was the most sober of men, and Mr. Ford for ten years had drunk nothing but water at his meals. He at once plunged eagerly into the matter of which his thoughts were full.

"Have you really got the numbers of the notes?" he asked.

"Of course I have. Why so?"

"Miss Gardiner and I met in the garden, and she asked me what steps should be taken in such a case as this."

Mr. O'Lally could not repress a start.

"Then it was she who lost the notes!" shrewdly exclaimed Mr. Ford.

"To tell you the truth, it was," answered Mr.

O'Lally, very much vexed at Annie's imprudence, but feeling that concealment was useless.

"I told you so this morning, mind, I told you she had taken something. Bless you, Mr. O'Lally, it is next to impossible to deceive and outwit me."

"I perceive it is very difficult," replied Mr. O'Lally, with an irony Mr. Ford did not detect.

"And I will tell you more," continued Mr. Ford; "the notes are not burned as you might suppose. Depend upon it, Miss Gardiner did not burn the notes last night—though, may be, she thought she did."

This remark Mr. Ford uttered with a sceptical tone he would not subdue; for his prejudice against Annie increased every moment, and, as usual, he expressed his gratification by a sort of vulgar smacking of his lips, which was, with him, an old and confirmed habit. It was impossible for Mr. O'Lally not to understand Mr. Ford's meaning; he covertly accused Annie of having taken the five hundred pounds; but much as he resented this accusation, he would not put Mr. Ford on his guard by understanding or repelling it, and externally he remained cool and unmoved.

"Suppose we sit up in your study to-night and watch for her," suggested Mr. Ford. "She may come again and put them back, you know."

The proposal suited Mr. O'Lally exactly, and

he accepted it. It was possible, after all, that Miss Gardiner had hidden the notes in her sleep, and that in her sleep she might reveal to the watchers where she had put them. There could be no harm in trying, and it was but fair to Mr. Ford to do so. On this agreement they parted. Mr. O'Lally went out as usual; Mr. Ford, contrary to his habit, remained within, and unless when Miss Gardiner went into the garden, did not stir out of the house.

Whilst Miss Emily was in a state of deep mental distress at the five hundred pounds her brother missed, and the five hundred pounds Mr. Ford had wanted to borrow, an unfortunate coincidence which distracted her, and, spite all her efforts, led her on the verge of the sin of rash judgment, Mr. Ford was trying to the utmost the patience of Miss Gardiner. Eager in his suspicion, and incautious as he too often was, he did not let the unfortunate young lady out of his sight. If she sat with the twin sisters, he sat and watched her stealthily, pretending, indeed, to be reading the newspaper, but not losing one of her movements. If she went into the garden, he sauntered out after her. If, becoming painfully conscious of the scrutiny to which she was subjected, Annie took refuge in her room, Mr. Ford went up to his and stayed in it, with the door ajar, until she came

down again, when he immediately followed her, trying to look careless, but acting his part very indifferently. Even Miss Ellen, though not of an observant turn, was struck with the strangeness of his behaviour, and wondered to her sister what could ail John, a remark which only further distracted Miss Emily, and, to use her own phrase, "upset her still more."

Mr. Ford, however, with that sad mixture of blindness and shrewdness which characterized him, only saw the fever and agitation of Annie, which he thought extremely suspicious, and never perceived the natural mistrust excited by the singularity of his own behaviour. His mind, entirely bent on one object, her detection, lost sight of all else. When evening came, and Mr O'Lally returned to dinner, he went out to meet him in the garden, and to say, with his imprudent eagerness,

"I have been watching all day, but I could find out nothing—nothing."

And he smacked his lips as if to have found out nothing were yet something to boast of.

"We shall see to-night," said Mr. O'Lally, quietly.

The evening passed without incident of any kind. Doctor Flinn came in, spent an hour with the family, and left early. Annie Gardiner, who looked very pale and ill, at once went up to

her own room, and Mr. Ford discovered that he was very sleepy, and went up immediately after her. He sat up till twelve, when Mr. O'Lally, as had been agreed, came and joined him.

They went to the study together, and waited there. Mr. Ford seemed in great glee. It was quite an adventure, and he enjoyed it. He stirred the fire, he trimmed the candle, he left his chair and came back to it, and, to Mr. O'Lally's annoyance, it took him a quarter of an hour to settle down to calmness. After this, indeed, he remained quiet enough, and sat patiently waiting. This vigil, in which he seemed to have no concern, interested him deeply. He had been watching Annie Gardiner the whole day, and never had her handsome dark eyes pleased him less. They were fine eyes, indeed, but too subtle for so young a girl. There was a melancholy in their depths that seemed to bespeak compassion and indulgence, for it told of much sorrow. Mr. Ford knew, too, through Miss Emily, that Annie, though an only child, had trembled before her father, a harsh man to all, to her doubly severe. The sadness of her countenance confirmed the story. But it was not pity, it was dislike he felt for Miss Gardiner. She was one of the obstacles who stood between him and the aim of his life, and in his heart he longed to make her atone for the wrong of which she was

unconscious. She was innocent—but Mr. Ford was not generous enough to forgive her the sin of her birth—besides, there was something secretively restless about her, which annoyed and irritated him. She scarcely spoke, her motions were silent, yet nothing seemed so foreign to this young girl as repose, nothing more remote from her nature than the calmness of innocent youth. With morbid and almost vindictive eagerness, he now sat with Mr. O'Lally, feeling sure that they would detect her. But nothing came of this long vigil. The house was deeply quiet, the very sea seemed silent, the western wind was hushed, and nothing stirred within or without. Mr. O'Lally looked at his watch, and rose.

"It is four," he said, "I shall detain you no longer."

"I am afraid she will not come," replied Mr. Ford, evidently disappointed.

Mr. O'Lally treasured up this admission of fear, but took no notice of it. He again said he would detain Mr. Ford no longer, and each retired to his own room.

"She was too cunning for me," thought Mr. Ford, as he closed his door, "I suppose she knew we were there."

He went to his bed, and as usual put his watch under his pillow; as he did so he felt something

rustle, he lifted the pillow quickly and saw a packet of banknotes lying beneath it. Mr. Ford stared at the notes as he still held the pillow in his hand. Who had put them there?—Annie, of course! But when? His mind rapidly flew over the whole day; he had ceased watching her only when he went to meet Mr. O'Lally in the garden before dinner. She was not asleep then—the inference was obvious; it was not in a fit of somnambulism that the notes were put there.

“Did she want to put the theft upon me?” thought Mr. Ford, angrily; “that would be like her father’s daughter.”

Mr. Ford’s first indignant impulse was to go and knock at Mr. O’Lally’s door and show him his discovery; and had he done so he would have given his innocence the chance of a doubt in Mr. O’Lally’s mind. But little as he liked Miss Gardiner, he could not, when the moment came, help wishing to spare her the shame of exposure; for he never doubted but his word would be believed.

“Let her escape this time,” he thought, “she knows she could not outwit me, and I shall give her a hint before going—it will be a lesson to her.”

With this merciful consideration Mr. Ford went to bed, and lost his last chance with Mr. O’Lally.

CHAPTER XIII.

SCARCELY did Miss Emily see her brother entering the dining-room, where her sister and Mr. Ford had already come down to breakfast on the morning that followed the vigil, than she exclaimed a little eagerly—

“My dear brother, I have been thinking about these notes——”

“I have found them,” interrupted Mr. O’Lally, sitting down.

Every one looked surprised.

“Yes,” he resumed, “I have just found them in my study.”

His tone implied a dislike of all comments, and none were made aloud at least.

Mr. Ford, who knew how the missing property had been restored, looked curiously at Annie across the table. She was calm and composed, but it

seemed to him that she shrank a little nervously from that steady, searching glance.

"Any messages for Dublin and London," he said, abruptly addressing his cousins—"I am going away this morning."

He spoke to the Miss Fords, but it was Annie he looked at. There was a sudden clearing of her countenance, which she could not conceal, but only a watchful eye could detect it—so slight was it, so quickly gone.

"Not this morning!" cried the two sisters in a breath—"not this morning, Cousin John!"

"This very morning," answered Mr. Ford, coolly. "My carpet-bag is packed, and I can easily walk to the stage-coach. It is only a few miles."

Protests, entreaties were vain alike. Mr. Ford was resolved on going, and he carried his resolve into effect as soon as breakfast was over.

Mr. O'Lally could not, would not hide the coldness with which he saw the cousin of his sisters depart; and Mr. Ford was so far from suspecting this, that he took a great deal of unnecessary pains in shunning every opportunity of talking privately with Mr. O'Lally.

He did not like Miss Gardiner, he was convinced of her guilt, but he pitied her for all that, and he still meant to give her a friendly warning before

he left. But unless he asked to speak to her in private, which was impossible, Mr. Ford found that he could not hope to say one word to this young lady. She clung to Miss Emily as closely as Miss Emily's own shadow, and when the two sisters said they would walk part of the way with their cousin—the servant-man was to carry the carpet-bag—Miss Gardiner, though she was not fond of pedestrian exercise, at once said she would go with them.

“My dear, it will fatigue you,” cried Miss Ellen, surprised, “you never walk.”

“It will do me good,” said Miss Gardiner, reddening a little; for even Mr. O’Lally seemed astonished at her resolve. Miss Emily objected too, but Miss Gardiner, still persisting that the walk would do her good, the morning being so fine, no further opposition was made.

In the coldest speech which politeness allows, Mr. O’Lally regretted that, not knowing Mr. Ford meant to leave that morning, he had made an appointment and must remain at home.

“Never mind,” said Mr. Ford, in his warm, cordial way; “never mind, only come and see us in London, that’s all.”

Mr. O’Lally smiled, and neither declined nor accepted the offer. He felt plenty of contempt for, but no resentment against Mr. Ford; it was

all clear to him now—he had come for money, ready to borrow, to take even if the opportunity fell in his way; and ready to depart without ceremony or shame when his object was detected or defeated. “Let him go,” he thought, as he stood on the threshold of the house, watching the party going down the garden; “only let neither him nor his ever be found under this roof again.”

Poor Mr. Ford! utterly unconscious of the terrible suspicion too much zeal in Miss Gardiner’s and Mr. O’Lally’s affairs had made him incur, he was then only thinking how best he might ward off the dark cloud he saw hanging over O’Lally’s town. Mr. O’Lally himself he could not meddle with. The young man was too penetrating and too keen to receive hints and explanations which Mr. Ford dare not give; Miss Gardiner shunned him, and clung to Miss Emily; and Miss Ellen was no one. To Emily, however, Mr. Ford was resolved on speaking: and as he was never one to stand much on form, he gently parted the two ladies, who were walking arm-in-arm, saying, as he did so:

“By your leave, Miss Gardiner, I have a few words to say to my cousin before we part.”

Miss Gardiner turned so pale, that even Miss Emily noticed it.

“What ails you?” she cried; “is it the walking?”

"I believe it is—I don't know—I shall go on a little farther and see."

She fell in the rear, and walked by Miss Ellen.

"I am quite uneasy about that girl," said Miss Emily; "she has not been herself these several days past."

"She will get better after I have gone," replied Mr. Ford, rather sarcastically; "and to tell you the truth, Emily, it is about her I wish to speak. Is your brother resolved on marrying Miss O'Flaherty?"

"I believe he is—a great trouble to us."

"Nonsense, let him marry her—and bless your stars he does not take Miss Gardiner."

"My gracious!—why so, John?"

"She is handsome, and I daresay rich; but if I were you, I should not like him to marry her."

"But why so?" again asked Miss Emily; "why, her land and my brother's join."

"Never mind. She walks in her sleep, Emily, she walks in her sleep. People who walk in their sleep do very strange things. I really think that bad, I do."

Miss Emily wanted to question him again, but Mr. Ford would say no more.

"Good-bye," he said, stopping short. "Good-bye, cousin. Miss Gardiner is tired, and you have come far enough. Michael will carry my carpet-bag, and I can do without you."

He was determined on going on alone, and they were compelled to humour him. Miss Emily, however, could scarcely conceal her displeasure at seeing a guest and cousin go off in this uncere- monious fashion, even on foot, with a carpet-bag, and without even the convenience of the jaunting-car, which was still under repair. Mr. Ford laughed.

"You and Livy would go well together," he said; "I shall send you Livy one of these days."

"Do," cordially cried Miss Emily.

"And Mab, too," said Mr. Ford.

"Do," said Miss Emily, again, but not quite so cordially, for she was a great stickler for birth and pure blood.

"Agreed," resumed Mr. Ford, shaking them both by the hand, and forgetting Miss Gardiner; "only it may not be just yet. Good-bye once more."

He left them as he spoke, and though they called out another adieu, he went on at a brisk pace, and never looked round. Miss Gardiner watched him till he was out of sight; then breathed a deep sigh. The sisters asked how she felt.

"Much better," she replied, smiling, and she did look much better indeed.

"It is very odd," said Miss Ellen, as they turned homewards; "but do you know, though I like John,

and was glad to see him, I feel almost happy he is gone. There seemed something wrong whilst he was here, and now I am relieved like, and think it over."

"Wrong? what wrong?" said Miss Emily.

"I don't know—but there was something; our brother was so odd—even Annie was not herself."

"I?" cried Miss Gardiner.

"Yes, my dear. Of course it was the presence of a total stranger—but still, I assure you, you were quite different. And I must say, John has strange ways; he was watching you yesterday so oddly, and our brother seemed to be watching him. I assure you I felt quite uncomfortable."

"We are not accustomed to strangers," said Miss Emily; "why, bless me, there is Doctor Flinn!"

It was indeed that gentleman himself who now came riding towards them, and who gallantly alighted to have, as he said, the pleasure of walking with such a galaxy of beauty. Of this galaxy, it so happened that Miss Emily alone remained by his side, for Miss Gardiner was gathering wild flowers, and Miss Ellen was helping her.

"What news?" asked Doctor Flinn.

"We have just been seeing John off."

Doctor Flinn stopped short and looked amazed, as he was indeed. Mr. Ford had gone without taking leave of him!

"It was a sudden departure," quickly said Miss Emily; "he begged to be kindly remembered to you, and was extremely sorry he could not go round and take leave of you this morning."

Doctor Flinn looked cool and important.

"I regret it," he said; "I regret it. Mr. Ford was an agreeable sort of man. Very."

Miss Emily looked stiff, and the pride of kindred came out in her rejoinder.

"I don't agree with you, Doctor Flinn. John is not agreeable to my taste; there is something decidedly blunt and unpleasant about him; but then he is a first-rate man of business, I suppose."

"Indeed, I would advise you to suppose no such thing, Miss Emily," plainly said Doctor Flinn; "he is not secretive—he cannot keep his own counsel. Now, in the law a man must know how to keep his mind to himself. You understand? He must make others work for him, actually, without their own knowledge! And this your cousin Mr. Ford cannot do!—he actually laid himself bare to me, almost a total stranger, with a facility which, if I were his client, I should consider deplorable. Why, if I liked, Miss Emily, I could just send a paragraph to a newspaper and expose a great English family to obloquy and ridicule. Of course it would be abominable and ungentlemanlike; but in the law, Miss Emily, in legal matters, the words

honour, and gentleman, and confidence are unknown, Miss Emily."

Doctor Flinn came to this conclusion with his natural good-humour, and leniently forgot Mr. Ford's sins. Miss Emily's surprise at length found vent in words.

"My gracious! Doctor Flinn, what are you talking about?"

Doctor Flinn laid his forefinger to his nose, and turning to Miss Ellen and Miss Gardiner, who now came up, he complimented that young lady, albeit no great favourite of his, on her blooming appearance.

Annie looked more than blooming. She looked like one from whom a weight of care has been removed—like one who has fought a hard battle, and come forth triumphant.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE Richmond excursion had only been a few days over, when Mab discovered they should give a party. Miss Lavinia spoke of the expense; but were not forty pounds inexhaustible wealth?

The first thing was to get a few girls: as well have a garden without roses as a party without girls.

"We must make sure of Anna and Laura Shaw," said Mab.

To get these young ladies, it was necessary to call upon the aunt with whom they lived in the neighbourhood of London; and this Mab and Miss Lavinia lost no time in doing.

"What shall we do if they are out of town, or cannot come?" anxiously exclaimed Mab, as the cab drove up to Mrs. Shaw's door; but out of town Anna and Laura were not, for through the bars of

the iron gate Mab saw them walking in the garden, and was seen by them. They ran to her with a joyful cry, and brightened up on hearing her errand.

“We are going to have a dance next Thursday; can you come?”

“Aunt will not let us,” despondently replied Laura; “she is so cross to-day.”

“Yes, she will,” answered the more hopeful Anna; “she must let us go—we go nowhere.”

A sober footman in the meanwhile ushered the ladies to the presence of Mrs. Shaw, a lady of fifty, who had recently married a young man of twenty-five related to her late husband, and who, though he had no present occupation, was, in Mrs. Shaw’s own words, “destined to be an ornament to the Church.”

Mrs. Shaw received Miss Lavinia and Mab very kindly, lent a favourable ear to Mab’s request, and was even so good as to declare that she and Mr. Shaw would accompany the young ladies.

“Shall we not, Mr. Shaw?” she added, turning to that gentleman, who sat extending his full length in a deep arm-chair.

“Certainly,” drawled Mr. Shaw; “I shall be most happy to accompany you, my love.”

Here Anna and her sister drew Mab aside to a whispered consultation concerning what they should

wear, which consultation ended in a request that she would come up and inspect their wardrobe. In the meanwhile, Mr. and Mrs. Shaw resumed a quarrel which the entrance of the visitors had interrupted.

“Would you believe it, Miss Ford!” exclaimed Mrs. Shaw, “just before you came in, Mr. Shaw actually put me beside myself. My basket-man came with the loveliest basket. Why, there he is again in the lane. Mr. Shaw, do ask him if he will take two-and-six for that basket. I know you can get it for me if you will only exert yourself.”

Mr. Shaw, either on account of the compliment, or because he really enjoyed bargaining as sport, or again, because he had a dimple in his chin, and was on the main extremely good-natured, rose, languidly stretched his long legs, and, lolling half out of a window which looked out on a lane, opened a conversation with the basket-man.

“How much will you take for it?” he asked.

“How much will you give?” was the reply.

“Two-and-six.”

“Make it three, sir.”

“Two-and-six, and be d—— to you!” was the answer which escaped the lips of this future ornament of the Church, with which he drew in his head and sank back on his seat.

"Mr. Shaw, you deed," said Mrs. Shaw; "you ought to be ashamed of yourself, Mr. Shaw!"

"*I*," he answered, with the greatest composure; "I never swear—never!"

"Miss Ford, you heard him. I know you must have heard him; he deed—I know he did—did he not?"

But without giving Miss Ford time to answer this embarrassing question, Mrs. Shaw went on, absorbed in her wrongs.

"I know he did it on purpose. I know he did not want me to have that basket, just because I had set my mind upon it. Now, I put it to you, Miss Ford, if Mr. Shaw had any regard for me, he would have offered the man two-and-nine; but now the man is gone, and I shall never see another such basket, and some one else will get it—Mrs. Reed wants it, I know."

"The devil take the basket and all basket buyers!" angrily exclaimed Mr. Shaw.

"Mr. Shaw, you are an unfeeling wretch to wish the devil to take your own wife, to whom you owe everything, from the coat you wear to the bread you eat. I am sure you are going to the devil yourself as fast as you can, though what he will do with you it puzzles me to know," kindly added Mrs. Shaw, "a long-legged, lazy fellow!"

These amenities of domestic life were sweet as

daily bread to Mr. and Mrs. Shaw, who literally lived upon them ; but they thoroughly frightened Miss Ford, who, rising in a great hurry, nervously wondered where her niece was.

"You surely are not going," cried Mr. and Mrs. Shaw, in a breath, for, not being troubled with superfluous delicacy, they rather relished the presence of a witness.

"Thank you, I am pressed for time," replied Miss Ford ; "may I trouble you—oh! here she is! My dear Mab, we must be going."

And scarcely giving her time to bestow a parting embrace on her friends, Miss Ford hurried Mab into the cab, and breathed a sigh of relief as it drove away.

"Such a disreputable pair!" she exclaimed ; "I never met with, never. My dear Mab, they may be very nice girls, but you really cannot have them at the party."

"But, aunt, they are coming."

"My dear, you did not hear what I heard—I tell you, it is out of the question."

Miss Ford was so unusually excited, that Mab prudently waited until she had calmed down to argue with her. Then, indeed, though not without some trouble, she succeeded in convincing Miss Lavinia that the invitation could not be withdrawn.

"I suppose not," despondently replied Miss La-

vinia; "but pray, my dear, never do ask that Mr. Shaw any more."

Mab gravely promised she would not, and immediately on her return home began the preparations for the party.

The drawing-rooms, being Mr. Ford's, could not be disturbed. The parlours, therefore, had to be cleared out, and the folding-doors to be taken down, and the carpets taken up exactly two weeks after they had undergone that operation.

"We cannot dance on carpets, aunt," said Mab; "think of the dust!"

Miss Lavinia sighed, and yielded. The carpets, on being taken up, showed many a weak spot.

"Oh! Mab," cried Miss Lavinia, with another sigh, "we might new carpet the floors with what that party will cost."

But Mab's prudence was not equal to such a sacrifice. The party she must and would have, and the more trouble it gave her the better she liked it. At length the happy evening came round. William declared that the rooms looked beautiful, and Mab and he had indeed done their best. The garden had been stript of its flowers to fill the vases; the grates were filled with the loveliest grasses which Mab had brought from Richmond, red velvet benches, and a piano completed the furniture, and wax-lights in bronze sconces lit the

scene over which Mab presided, attired in virgin white, and looking, William declared, "just like an angel."

No one had arrived yet when Robert came down. Mab surveyed him in the looking-glass, and could not help admiring him. He was very handsome and gentlemanlike, and "he is mine," thought Mab with secret satisfaction. Robert, who was drawing on his white kid gloves, eyed Mab with similar feelings. She looked very charming, and she was, or would be his. It was decidedly agreeable to have this sort of property coming in to him some day; unluckily he chose to extend his jurisdiction over it at once, and in a manner which was not pleasant to Mab.

"Mab," he said, still fitting on his gloves, "you will not waltz with Frederick, of course."

"I promised him the second waltz last night," she replied, very composedly.

Robert looked amazed.

"The second waltz!" he echoed. "Once for all, Mab, I beg you to understand that you are to waltz with no one but with me."

Habitual respect for Robert alone checked Mab's reply; but her cheeks burned with indignation. Robert, confident of victory, did not choose to pursue his advantage by giving her a lecture—indeed, he had not time to do so, a knock was

heard, and the first visitors arrived. They proved to be Anna and Laura, without either their aunt or Mr. Shaw. Mab looked surprised.

"We ran away!" giggled the two sisters in a breath.

"Ran away?"

"Yes, aunt and Mr. Shaw began quarrelling just as we were ready. Mr. Shaw was savage because the rice pudding broke, and aunt burst into tears, and said she would go to bed and there should be no party—so, when we saw this, we got into the cab and drove off."

"Shan't we get it when we go home, though?" was Annie's comfortable reflection.

Mab professed her pleasure to have them any way, and Laura looked at Robert, who had discreetly walked away, with disinterested admiration.

"How well Mr. Robert Ford looks!" she said softly.

"Yes, he is not amiss," carelessly said Mab.

"Amis!" the two sisters were shocked at such heresy. Why, he was quite handsome, and so gentlemanlike.

"You must see Frederick Norton," said Mab, still careless. More knocks now came at the door. Friends of Robert's—then Frederick, his sister, and Mrs. Norton. Whilst Anna and Laura looked

at Frederick, Mab gave Ellen a rapid glance, on which followed a sudden blush.

There was no concealing the fact from herself. Mab was not to be queen that night. Ellen Norton was attired from head to foot in delicate rose colour, and she looked terrestrial indeed, but extremely lovely. Her dark hair and eyes, her charming neck and shoulders, had a southern warmth and grace which matched the blooming roses in her bosom. She was life, youth, and beauty, and Mab, though too proud to be envious, was woman enough to resent being effaced.

“What a sweet girl!” whispered Anna. “But we do not admire her brother at all. How *could* you compare him to Mr. Robert Ford?”

Mab did not answer. She was watching Mr. Robert Ford, and it seemed to her that he thought Miss Ellen Norton a very sweet girl indeed. He looked at her, talked to her, laughed with her, and, finally, when the dancing began, he danced with her almost to the exclusion of any one else. Politeness, no doubt, required some of this behaviour, but politeness, thought Mab, might have made him attentive to her friends Anna and Laura, and for once Robert was not so. He left them to the charity of his brothers, and Mab to his friends and Frederick and Mr. Shaw. For here is the place to remark, that scarcely had the dancing begun

when Mr. Shaw made his appearance, all smiles and sweetness; and that scarcely had he taken Mab for his partner, when a cab stopped at the door, and Mrs. Shaw entered the ball-room, in a low dress, and with a wreath of roses in her hair; the whole of which took place to the no small trepidation of poor Miss Lavinia, as she sat at the piano kindly playing quadrilles.

But her music and the pleasure of the young people were both doomed to a third and more terrible interruption. A pause had taken place in the dancing—the waltzing was going to begin; Miss Lavinia, without leaving the music-stool, was taking a glass of negus from a tray held by the demure greengrocer who waited at parties in a solemn black coat and white cravat, when she dropped it with a crash. The door had opened, and on the threshold stood Mr. Ford, his brown eyes wandering wrathfully over the scene of extravagance and dissipation, a sarcastic smile on his lips, whilst he uttered the ominous words which Miss Lavinia heard but too well:

“Ay, ay, the mice can play whilst the cat’s away.”

William and Edward looked dismayed. Even Robert was not quite self-possessed; but Mab, throwing down her bouquet of white roses, sprang to Mr. Ford with a joyful cry.

"Oh! uncle, uncle!" she sobbed and laughed, throwing her arms around his neck. Ay, there was no fear, and there was true love and joy in that welcome. It did much towards softening Mr. Ford's anger. He kissed her with a smile, and his old hospitable feeling rising above his new stinginess, he uttered a hearty:

"I am glad to see you all, young people; go on—go on, dance away. I shall sit and look—I am not tired. Go on with your music, Livy; go to your partner, Mab."

"I cannot, uncle—let me sit by you."

"But let the others dance. Mrs. Shaw, I am glad to see you so young. Come, what was it, Livy? A waltz, a polka, a quadrille?"

Miss Lavinia, who had much rather play than talk to her brother, very willingly obeyed his request, and the waltzing began. Frederick was rather disconsolate at the loss of his partner, but Robert, as Mab could not help seeing, after exchanging a few words with his father, returned to Ellen—ay, and remained with her the whole evening. Mab bit her lip, her colour rose, and Mr. Ford saw there was something amiss.

"Are you not well, Mab?" he asked.

"Indeed, uncle, I am very well," replied Mab, trying to smile.

But Mr. Ford saw the effort. He could imagine

but one cause for her discomposure, and he kindly whispered:

“Never mind about the money, my little pet; it is all yours, my darling.”

Mab looked surprised, then she laughed as she understood his meaning, but the cloud did not leave her brow.

CHAPTER XV.

ON the next day Mr. Ford settled accounts with his household. The younger members of the family escaped indeed, but Miss Lavinia, Robert, and Mab were separately required to give explanations of their conduct, and very differently dealt with, for impartial justice was not one of Mr. Ford's attributes.

Poor Miss Lavinia came first, and received the brunt of her brother's displeasure.

"Well, Livy," he sarcastically said, "fine doings, I find, whilst I was away. Richmond Park—was the breakfast at the Star and Garter?—a party at home. Livy, Livy, is it at your time of life you should be thinking of these frivolities? And the supper table! Why, there was food for a week on that table. How many joints, I wonder, were cut up in sandwiches? And the fowls and the

tarts! Livy, Livy, I thought you had more discretion!"

Miss Ford was too generous to exculpate herself at Mab's expense, so she said nothing. Mr. Ford continued:

"This is my first journey, but it shall not be my last—once for all, Livy, I will have no such doings in my house."

"Very well, John," meekly replied Miss Lavinia; but Robert, who met her on the staircase, found her in tears.

"What is the matter, aunt?" he kindly asked.

"My dear boy, do not go near your father," whispered Miss Lavinia, "that party has upset him."

But Robert was not frightened; he wanted, moreover, to obtain such indirect information as his father's countenance and manner might convey, and he entered the back drawing-room in which Mr. Ford sat, casting up accounts. He looked up from his papers, and said sharply:

"Robert, I have just been telling your aunt that I will have no more such doings in my house. I mean to go away again, no matter when, nor for how long a time, but I will not find the place topsy turvy when I choose to return."

"He means to go away again," thought Robert; "then he has failed," and Mr. Ford's ill-tempered manner confirmed him in the belief.

"*You* ought to have known better, if your aunt was such a fool," crossly continued Mr. Ford; "what have people in our circumstances to do with parties and such fal-lals?"

"I am quite willing to bear the expense of this entertainment," replied Robert.

"Is this your house, sir?" asked Mr. Ford, striking his fist on the table, and speaking with angry eyes. "Is this your house? No; well, then, talk of giving parties at your expense when you have a house of your own."

Jealousy had driven Robert into his engagement with Mab, and temper now did her best to drive him into marriage.

"I do not mind how soon I have a house of my own," he answered coolly; "Mab and I are engaged."

Mr. Ford was thunderstruck. Every one else in the house had seen what was coming, he never had. The news fell upon him with the suddenness of an unforeseen calamity. He stared at Robert, who calmly answered the look with another, that meant "I have said it, and I will stand by it."

"Engaged," vaguely said Mr. Ford; "engaged whilst I was away, Robert?"

Robert did not answer. Mr. Ford's features worked, and his lips trembled. He saw it all now.

Robert wanted Mab, because he believed she would be rich some day ; for no other reason. For it was not in Mr. Ford's nature to be fair even to his own son.

"That is how I am treated," he said, with much bitterness. "You do not merely engage yourself without my knowledge or consent, but you rob me of the only being in this house that really cares for me. Robert—Robert, you will have children of your own, and you will feel it yet ! Was it so hard, then, to wait for my return ? You have known her ten years, was it only when my back was turned that you could find out your own mind ?"

Robert was spared the trouble of answering. Mab, in passing by the door, heard Mr. Ford's voice raised beyond its usual pitch. She guessed that her party was getting some one into trouble ; and, willing to bear her share of the blame, aware, too, how light that share would be, she unceremoniously opened the door and entered, crying gaily,

"It was I did it all, uncle ; indeed, it was."

"Was it ?" said Mr. Ford, half smiling.

"Indeed it was ; I had set my mind on having a party."

He drew her to his side, and looked half fondly, half sadly in her face.

“So you and Robert are engaged,” he said.

Mab coloured and looked not unkindly at Robert. She had wakened in a mood by no means favourable to her lover. She was not jealous, at least she did not think herself so, but she felt slighted, and she was hurt. In the height of her displeasure she had resolved to inform him that though she did not wish to break their engagement, she thought it had best be reconsidered, as she was sure he must have committed some mistake about his own feelings; but by speaking so promptly to his father, Robert had given her a sure pledge of his sincerity; and as she was of a most placable disposition, and did not know how his avowal had been brought about, Mab, as we said, looked kindly on Robert and forgot her wrath.

“Yes,” she said, turning round to Mr. Ford, with a happy smile, “we are engaged, if you like it, uncle; for we set that condition on it—did we not, Robert?”

Robert assented, and Mr. Ford’s displeasure lessened considerably.

“And, of course, you will consent,” coaxingly continued Mab; “you would not break our hearts, would you, uncle?”

Mr. Ford pinched her cheek, and looked at her tenderly. Break her heart? Was she not the apple of his eye?

"No hearts need be broken through me," he said; "but you are both too young to marry, you especially, Mab. You must wait till you are of age at least."

"How can I know when I am of age?" asked Mab, with some emotion.

"We can guess it," answered Mr. Ford, reddening slightly, for he felt his son's eye upon him. "You understand, Robert," he added, sharply, "do not wish you to marry Mab until she is of age."

"So I have heard you saying," coldly replied Robert.

"And I think it is high time for you to go to your office," crossly continued Mr. Ford.

Robert looked at his watch.

"I have five minutes yet," and he remained until the time was out; Mab followed him down stairs.

"Robert," she said, "what is there between your father and you?"

"You ask it—why, a child could see it. He hates me—he has always hated me, and it exasperates him that I should have you. And I will have you," continued Robert, his lip quivering with anger; "ay, and before you are of age either, Mab. Am I going to be dictated to as a boy? I will not submit to it."

Mab was thoroughly frightened. Robert, whose temper was roused—and he had not a good temper,

though he controlled it well as a general rule—resumed, with the same cold anger,

“Mab, I have borne much because he is my father—there are things I cannot bear. No one must meddle with you—not even he—you understand.”

“Robert, dear Robert,” Mab said imploringly, “I am yours, indeed I am—then be but patient, for my sake.”

Her entreating tone softened Robert considerably. It was his future wife who spoke, who looked up in his face with that tender, appealing glance. Robert’s love for Mab, though sincere, was like that of most young men, all the better for a little opposition. Frederick’s admiration had given Mab double value in his eyes; his father’s reluctant consent and threatened delay now made him feel impatient to possess her at once.

“I will be patient,” he said, “but I will not wait four years to have you.”

Something in his tone frightened Mab. She gave him a startled look, which Robert would not see. He took down his hat and walked out of the house, burning with far more anger than he had shown to Mab. The secret war between him and his father had now become an open contest. “He does not want me to have Mab,” thought Robert, “and it can only be out of hatred to me. If she

is to remain poor, she will scarcely get a better offer than mine; if she is to become rich, why should I not have her?"

That Mr. Ford might feel anxious for Mab's happiness and not care to trust him with it, Robert would not admit. He felt quite easy on that head. Of course Mab would be very happy with him. He was not over head and ears in love with her; but that sort of love was not one of the requisites of marriage, and he was quite fond enough of Mab, who was a very sweet and pretty girl, to make her an affectionate husband, even as he had no doubt that she would make him a true and loving wife. In short, Robert felt for Mab what ninety-nine men out of a hundred feel for their future wives; the strong and ruling passion, which never calculates, and admits of no obstacles, being, fortunately for the peace and happiness of society, a rare occurrence.

But if Robert felt little trouble concerning the responsibility of Mab's happiness, he was too practical not to dislike the prospect of marrying on a hundred and fifty pounds a year. He could not and he would not do it. He must try Mr. James George again, and, before trying him, he would pay Captain George a morning visit. He had easily discovered his residence, and only delayed availing himself of the knowledge until his father's

return. Mr. Ford had failed in his attempt : why not try his own diplomatic skill on Captain George ? Forsaking, therefore, the road that led to the office, Robert now made his way to the Seven Dials.

Captain George, after giving up the pretty furnished villa in Brompton, had gone to Italy. There he and Mrs. George had shone for a time ; they had soon returned to England, and, although Mrs. George's chest was delicate, they had left it no more. Some people die gracefully, like the Roman gladiator, from the splendour of thousands—they sink down to the genteel mediocrity of hundreds ; but no such gradation had marked the fall of Captain and Mrs. George. It resembled the catastrophe of great empires : it was sudden and overwhelming. So long as Captain George's credit lasted, and, strange to say, it long outlived his ready money, he kept his carriage, and Mrs. George her maid ; but from the moment that Captain George stood once more a detected man in the London world of tradesmen, he was utterly ruined. When Captain and Mrs. George left their noble mansion, as it was styled in the bills, they sank into the utter abomination of rooms. A variety of these they had had. The New Road and the New Cut saw Captain George's swaggering hat, and were witness to his fierce encounters with street dealers in the way of bargaining ; but from

these he vanished in time, and entered the demesnes of the Seven Dials. There Robert now found him. He passed through an offensive court, groped up a narrow staircase, and, knocking for form's sake, entered a small but decidedly cheerful room, which was also scrupulously clean. It was a very small room, and, having a bed in it, was evidently the whole of Captain George's apartment.

Mrs. George was sitting by the window in an arm-chair, covered with crimson silk, a stray waif from the mansion, and which Captain George had conveyed away, spite the execution put in by the indignant upholsterer. She wore a plain brown silk, rather faded and stained, but which had been first-rate in its day. A clear white cap enshrined her motherly face, and as she sat thus, the pleasant morning sun shining upon her through the half-open window, outside of which blossomed a pot of mignonette and hung a bird's cage, she looked a picture of every domestic virtue. Mrs. George had grown deaf of late, and she neither looked nor turned round when Robert entered. Captain George remained likewise unobservant, but it was from a different motive. Captain George was engaged. He sat on a low stool in his waistcoat, but with his hat on, facing the fire, thus toasting a dainty rasher of bacon. The teapot stood on the hob, the kettle sang merrily, and on a plate within the

fender lay two crisp rashers of bacon, there awaiting their third companion.

"Well, Giachino," said Captain George, without looking round, "what have you got this morning?"

"You take me for another person, Captain George," said Robert, shutting the door and coming forward as he spoke.

Now, here is one of the comforts of extreme poverty: it is fearless. Captain George was neither disconcerted nor alarmed at the sudden appearance of this stranger. He owed thousands, and yet he was armour proof. He moved with the freedom of conscious rectitude and perfect innocence, though surrounded by incensed creditors. What could they do? He was poor, utterly poor, and to make Captain George live and die in a prison was useless revenge. With thorough coolness, he therefore scanned Robert from head to foot, and though he knew him at once, he greeted him with a—

"What the devil do you mean by coming in without knocking?" which was insolent, and was meant to be so.

Before Robert could answer, Captain George continued in the same aggressive tone, but now tinged with austere rebuke,

"I think, sir, you might take your hat off in the

presence of Mrs. George. I keep mine on because I have a cold in my head, sir."

Robert had come prepared to bear much, and especially resolved not to lose his temper.

"I knocked," he said, "but you did not hear, I suppose. I am Mr. Ford's eldest son."

"And what's that to me?" replied Captain George.

"I have come to speak to you on business," continued Robert, glancing at Mrs. George, who was looking benevolently at him from her chair.

"Well, sir, Mrs. George is no hindrance, I suppose. I have no secrets from Mrs. George, and moreover," added Captain George, growing facetious, and flourishing his toasting fork as he showed the room to Robert, "this apartment is my study, my bedroom, and Mrs. George's boudoir as well."

Robert hesitated, but he was pretty certain indeed that Mrs. George was, as her husband said, acquainted with all his private affairs, and, without losing time in feeling his ground, he said bluntly,

"I have called to ask you to give me some information concerning Miss Winter; I believe you can give it if you choose."

"If I choose!" ironically repeated Captain George, turning back to the fire; "go on, sir."

"There is no going on: do you choose or not to

give me that information? Of course I am willing to pay for it."

"And how much will you give?" asked Captain George, looking back.

Robert hesitated.

"A thousand pounds on the day when she recovers her property."

Captain George shook his head.

"That will never do," he said, "never."

"How much do you expect?" asked Robert; "two thousand?"

"Half."

"And how much is that?"

"I say again half."

"Well, then, suppose we make it half; but on one condition: it must be done within three months."

"Dear, dear!" exclaimed Captain George, slowly wagging his hat from right to left, and looking round at Robert with a sneer, "to see how covetous youth is! Now, what can you want with all that money? Oh! the greediness of youth!"

"Will you do it, or will you not?" impatiently asked Robert.

Captain George, still wagging his hat from right to left, said slowly,

"Were you ever in your young days advised to catch a bird by laying salt on its tail; and having made the attempt, did you ever succeed in it? Be-

cause," he added, without waiting for Robert's reply, "that is just what you have been doing this morning. So you want to marry little 'Never mind,' and would rather have money with her than not, and having failed in getting any out of that screw, James, you come to the poor old Captain. A thousand pounds! Anything will do for the old Captain. Then make it two, then make it half—shan't be hurt—nothing be done to him, so he gets me the cash. Why, you young fool," he added, with a sudden change of tone, and derisively pointing the toasting fork at Robert like a gigantic and scornful forefinger, "if Captain George could get half, he could get the whole; and if he could get the whole, he would defy you to get a farthing of it out of him. Why, your father is just breaking his heart about this, and running and hunting on a wild goose chase, but he knows better than to attempt to bribe me. He throws me a five-pound note now and then, and I throw him a bone in the way of information that does me no harm, and it does him no good—but you, you simpleton, to come here and attempt to *do me!*"

Robert scorned to argue; he turned to the door, and, as it closed upon him, he had the pleasure of hearing Captain George say, as he resumed the toasting of his bacon, "Green, decidedly green!"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE young man would not allow himself to be vexed. He acknowledged his defeat. Something like information might be got out of Captain George, but he could not be made to act against himself. He might be at drawn daggers with his brother, but he was none the less his brother's legal heir. Was it likely he would diminish a fortune which might yet revert to him. "Of course I went the wrong way to work," thought Robert. The conclusion did not do Robert justice, it was not so much that he had gone the wrong to work, as that he was not suited to his work. His will was tortuous, his nature straightforward. He could and would not resist the temptation of trading in Mr. George's secret ; but he lacked the subtlety required for his part. He lacked the patience too, and the check he had just received only strengthen-

ed his resolve to try Mr. George once more, and bring matters to an issue.

"Let him dismiss me if he dare," he thought as he approached the office.

Mr. James George had recently given up his airy and cheerful abode on the outskirts of London, and taken up his home within the dismal precincts where his business was transacted. Economy was supposed to be his motive, for Mr. George was of a saving turn. His new establishment was certainly conducted on strictly economical principles. Mrs. Smith superintended; under her acted a plain cook, who was also housemaid, and the porters and messengers required for the business proved convenient substitutes for either footman or page. The pretty girl, with whom Robert had once taken tea, was never seen in the dull city house. From some words which Mr. James George dropped, Robert understood that she was in a fashionable boarding-school on the outskirts of London.

She was certainly better there than at the house, which, after being merely Mr. George's office, had now become his permanent residence. It was not situated in those parts of the ancient City of London where shop-fronts and walls of plate-glass reveal the profuse wealth within. It stood far out of the way of that great stream of activity and life

which flows around the island of St. Paul's. The neighbourhood was almost a quiet one, and the street in which Mr. George's office was to be found, had of the City attributes none save its dirt and smoke. It possessed these in perfection. A sombre mist brooded over it in fine weather ; on dull days it became fog—yellow and lurid. Soot clung to the fronts of the gloomy brick houses, and the brass plates on the doors were the only bright spot about them. Few of the windows had curtains, for these houses were mostly used as offices and stores, and needed no foolish muslin. About the middle of the street, on the left-hand side, stood a church, black and ancient, and around it a garden of graves ; both enclosed by black iron railings. This church faced Mr. George's abode, and both church and graveyard were visible from the official windows on the first-floor.

Mr. James George had rarely been late when he lived five miles away from the office—now he was never late ; and, being a just man, he expected his clerks to be as punctual as himself. When Robert, therefore, appeared a full hour behind his time, he found his employer setting his watch by the church dial.

"How do you do, Ford ?" he kindly asked. "I was afraid you were unwell."

"I am late," said Robert, "but I am very well, thank you, sir."

"I am glad to hear it; and now, Ford, let me give you a piece of information, you may find it useful. What do you suppose is the result of living opposite a church?"

"Really, sir," replied Robert, sitting down to his desk, "the question is too comprehensive for me to answer it."

"Well, you are right. Living opposite a church has many consequences; one amongst the rest is, that one's watch is sure to be always wrong. Now, what do you suppose is the real time?"

"I am afraid to say, sir; for I know I am an hour late."

"Are you, indeed!"

"We sat up late last night," continued Robert, "my father came home from a long journey, and, moreover, thinking I had time to spare—I cannot imagine how I committed the mistake—I called on Captain George before coming here."

"Oh! ah! indeed! And how is Captain George?"

"Very well in health, I believe; but not in as good a temper as persons anxious to transact business with him might wish him to be."

Mr. James George said nothing: he was still setting his watch, but Robert, who was looking at him boldly, saw that his hand shook a little.

He resumed.

"A very odd matter sent me there. Captain George possesses, it seems, some valuable information, which I hoped to make available; but Captain George was not willing. I must find some one else."

Robert bit the end of his pen as he spoke, and again looked at Mr. George.

"Valuable information!" said that gentleman. "Of what kind?"

This question Robert was not inclined to answer; but he said coolly,

"My position in life is not a brilliant one; it is natural I should seek to improve it."

"Natural!" cried Mr. George, struck with the soundness of this doctrine; "I say it is an admirable endeavour, Ford—an admirable endeavour!"

Robert smiled, and bowed. No more was said. The young man bent over his desk, and set about his daily tasks. Mr. George retired to his private room, and remained there until luncheon time; as one o'clock struck, Robert heard him leave the house, and, looking out cautiously, he saw him turn round the corner of the old black church, and vanish in its shadow.

Mr. George never went out during business hours, which for him extended from ten till four.

What took him out now? Robert could not doubt he was the cause, and he would reap the reward, or pay the penalty of Mr. James George's infraction to his daily habits. For a moment the thought that he might lose his situation—for to speak of having called upon Captain George was tantamount to resuming the forbidden subject of Mab—startled Robert. He had never known anxiety. From his thirteenth year to the present day he had earned his bread with moderate labour and thorough security. But now he had risked that peace of mind, that certainty, which are invaluable and rare. He almost wished he had held his tongue, and not spoken of Captain George; but second thoughts made him scorn this timorous mood, and rely on a better issue.

The day passed in alternatives of doubt and hope. Robert's labour was over, and he was rising to depart, when he heard Mr. George's voice inquiring below if Mr. Ford was gone, and the servant's answer—"Mr. Ford was still up-stairs."

"Now for it," thought Robert. Mr. George's heavy step creaked up the stair-case, and in another minute Mr. George entered the room. He was cheerful and smiling—a bad sign.

"Not gone yet, Ford," he said, gaily.

"I was going, sir."

"Just so—just so," cheerfully continued Mr.

George ; "I have been thinking over that matter, Ford."

"That matter," and even simply "this," were favourites with Mr. George. He used them to express a great deal, and Robert seldom troubled him for an explanation; but not being now in a mood to humour Mr. George, he coldly asked :

"What matter, sir?"

"Oh! ah, to be sure. And so you are not satisfied with three hundred pounds a year?"

"With what, sir?"

"I committed a mistake—with a hundred and fifty pounds a year."

The heart of Robert began to beat, but it was not with fear.

"No sir," he said, dropping his sharp tone, "I am not."

"Just so—you want three hundred. I see—in short, Ford, you want to marry Miss Winter."

"I do, sir."

"And you also want something for your brothers—promising youths, I believe. Well now, Ford, this is what I shall do for you. I will procure each of your brothers a situation with a hundred pounds salary; I will, as a testimonial of my satisfaction, give Miss Winter five hundred pounds on her wedding day, and I will double your salary—make it three hundred, in short."

Robert was standing at his desk. He neither moved, nor looked, nor smiled. Cool as ice, he listened to Mr. George.

"I will do this, and no more," resumed Mr. George, in a cold, hard tone.

"May I ask what you expect from me in return?" inquired Robert.

"Nothing as yet, Ford, nothing as yet—a little extra work and responsibility in this office, of course, but nothing to speak of."

Robert drew on his gloves, and quietly said :

"I am much obliged to you. I shall think over it."

"Why, no—that will not do," said Mr. George ;
"no, Ford, I cannot allow you to think it over."

"Then I must ask again to know what you expect from me in return?"

"Why, nothing, absolutely nothing," said Mr. George, looking very much surprised ; "I am giving you a token of my satisfaction—no more. And allow me to wonder at the extraordinary way in which you receive such a token of your employer's approbation."

This reproach, albeit urged in a feeling tone, produced very little effect upon Robert. But though he had not much faith in Mr. George's word, he chose for once to believe him, or to seem to do so.

"I am happy to think I have deserved your approbation, sir," he said, quietly; "and much obliged to you for the substantial method you have taken to express it. Of course," he added, laying some stress on the words, "I accept."

"Very well, very well, Ford," exclaimed Mr. George, looking extremely cheerful; "allow me to congratulate you, Ford, on your prospects—shake hands, Ford—three hundred a year! Very handsome—*very* handsome, Ford!"

Robert was too much accustomed to Mr. George's ways to be surprised at hearing himself congratulated by that gentleman on a piece of good fortune which came through him.

"And my brothers, sir?" he said, when Mr. George had shaken his hand enough; "where are they to be?"

"One at Sampson's, the other at Richard's & Co."

"Good houses both," said Robert, with sparkling eyes; "but is it certain?"

"You will not put that question next week," playfully said Mr. George.

Robert's eyes beamed; he felt treading upon air. His own three hundred a year, Mab herself, were not as sweet as this good fortune which opened so fair before his brothers.

"And when do you mean to get married?" playfully asked Mr. George.

Robert reddened.

"Soon, sir," he said; "my narrow income alone delayed my doing so."

"Mind I shall give away the bride," paternally said Mr. George.

Robert was staggered. The proposal was the very sublime of audacity. He, Mr. James George, give away Mab! Robert blushed with anger and shame, and his better nature so far prevailed that he plainly replied:

"That is, unfortunately, impossible. Miss Winter must decline the honour."

"What, already bespoken!—well, well—I shall be godfather at least."

The temper of his father, blunt and violent by fits, rose within Robert at this pertinacious insolence. He turned on Mr. George, and gave that gentleman a look so significant and so stern, that Mr. George, dropping all facetiousness, said with decided sharpness:

"I beg you will not be late to-morrow."

"I shall not," was Robert's short answer; and taking down his hat, he walked downstairs without bidding Mr. George good evening. "The audacious villain!" he muttered as he walked along the pavement. "Give Mab away!"

But where was the use of anger? Why resent Mr. George's cold villainy any more than Captain

George's broad insolence? Robert's wrath cooled as he walked along the streets, still hot with the sultriness of the day, and now fast thinning of their eager and wearied crowds. It was a beautiful and still evening. An evening that made Robert think of Richmond, and villas by the Thames, and gardens, where Mab would train the drooping roses and feed the white swans, and he stand and look on. He felt very happy. Could he have hoped, in the morning, to attain his end so easily? His conscience, indeed, gave him a few pricks—the means he had taken were not exactly straight, not such means as a man cares to avow in the open day; but did not that severe censor confess that his end was unselfish and true? If he used Mab, did he not use her to the best advantage for herself as well as for his own sake?

Would his father's wild researches and unequal struggle against a powerful and unscrupulous enemy ever bring in what Robert had obtained with so little effort? Dear Mab, he certainly loved her very much just then! And William and Edward! his heart swelled with joy as he thought of their two beaming faces. A hundred a year each, and that was not all; would not he push them on and make men of them yet!

All this was delightful, but there was a thought

that would come to Robert again and again, taking the form of a question. What would Mr. George ask of him in return for three hundred a year, two good situations, and five hundred pounds on Mab's wedding day? And the same monitor that questioned replied: Mr. George will exact some renunciation, how worded does not matter, but surely effective and complete, of Mab's rights, past and future. Something that will undo all Mr. Ford's efforts, and set the seal on her destiny. Robert was staggered. Could it be that his father was near success, and that, Esau-like, he (Robert) was selling his all for a mess of porridge? Were Mr. George's concessions the result of well-grounded apprehensions, or of his own fearful nature? To the latter conclusion Robert inclined. His father had been failing all these years, what should make him succeed now? Besides, could Mr. George bind him so fast that he should never be free again? Might not the bargain do for Mr. George's lifetime, and end with his death? But Robert stopped as he came to this conclusion. He was young, only twenty-three, and he did not like the turn his thoughts were taking: they were not frank, they were not honest; they were the thoughts of a deceiver. Robert might be ready for temptation, but he was not so ripe as to forestall it. In his own belief, at least, he was still true.

It was a relief, however, to enter Queen Square and dismiss these unpleasant cogitations. The little enclosure looked green and fresh, and, as he passed it by, Robert recognized Mab's muslin dress. She saw him and let him in. Robert took her arm, and, pressing it to his side, said tenderly :

"Mab, we shall soon be in our villa by the Thames : my salary is doubled—I earn three hundred a year."

Mab was amazed and dazzled at an income so splendid.

"How happy uncle and aunt will be!" she cried.

"We cannot tell them yet, Mab. It is a business secret."

But though the five hundred pounds were a secret too, Robert could not help telling Mab. She was lost in astonishment and admiration. Her eyes sparkled with glad enthusiasm. What a business paragon Robert must be, she thought! and as she thought she spoke. Never had Robert liked Mr. George less than when he listened to Mab's unmerited praise. He hastened to interrupt her with the declaration that he had still better news in store.

"What better than what you have just told me, Robert?"

"Yes, guess."

"Mr. George is giving you a villa on the

Thames, and puts you down for a thousand a year in his will."

"Don't be childish, Mab; he has procured William and Edward situations of a hundred a year each."

"And is that your rare news?"

"It is."

He looked jealous, and ready to be vexed, if Mab were not pleased enough; but though she wondered if Robert really loved her half as much as he loved his brothers, she called up her brightest smiles to please him. He saw the effort, and exclaimed:

"Mab, something has happened; what is it?"

"What should have happened?" asked Mab, with unusual equivocation.

"There they are!" he cried, seeing his brothers knock at the door of the house; and, in his eagerness to follow them, and give them the happy tidings, he forgot his question.

Yet Robert was not mistaken. Something had happened; something which Mab would never tell him, and which she would remember yet with mingled grief and shame in many an hour of keen sorrow.

Frederick Norton had proposed to Mab that morning, and been rejected. He had uttered no reproaches; but he had given her a look of such

sad surprise, that, with the deepest humiliation, Mab had felt how great her guilt had been. The time may come when she will feel it better still.

CHAPTER XVII.

“WHAT will you give me for my news?” asked Robert, overtaking his brothers, and entering the house with them.

Robert was rarely jocose. On hearing him speak so gaily, Edward knew that something of importance had happened. He turned round, and looked eagerly in his elder brother’s face. Robert smiled, and William looked at Mab, who, rising on tip-toe, whispered something in his ear. William’s face grew bright as day, and holding out his hand, he exclaimed :

“Oh ! Robert !”

“But what are you shaking hands for?” asked Edward.

“We have situations of a hundred a year each,” replied William. “There never was a brother like Robert.”

"I think there never were brothers like mine," proudly said Robert.

They all entered the front parlour, and repeated the news for the benefit of Mr. Ford and Miss Lavinia. Miss Lavinia received the tidings with a hysterical joy, in which admiration for Robert's superhuman goodness decidedly exceeded her satisfaction at the good fortune of William and Edward. Then the glorious prospects were discussed. Sampson's was a first-rate house—first-rate!—and Richards and Co. was excellent. Great changes were effected in five minutes; Mab and Aunt Lavinia each received the promise of a silk dress, the parlours were re-carpeted and re-furnished; holidays by the sea-side, with something very like yachting, were planned. Never had two hundred a year gone so far as these two hundred pounds.

"Well, uncle," said Mab, going up to Mr. Ford, who had not spoken one word, "is it not good news?"

"There never was any one like Robert," murmured Miss Lavinia, "never."

Mr. Ford did not answer: he was very pale. Mab felt his arm tremble beneath her hand; it was plain he had received a shock—but why so?

"And how did Robert get these situations?" he asked at length.

"Why, through that good old Mr. George, of

course," replied Mab; "I used to dislike him—I did not know why. I shall love him now."

Mr. Ford breathed hard, and set his teeth, but he controlled himself.

"Very good news, as you say," he observed, with a vacant look; "is dinner ready, Lavinia?"

Even Mab was hurt and disappointed at his coldness; even she thought it unnatural that the good fortune of his sons should leave him so careless and indifferent; even she began to understand that they could not love him.

Alas! she did not know how keen a pang the news had inflicted—what bitter memories they had awakened! Had he too not come home once overflowing at the good fortune of having disposed of Robert for sixty pounds a year—and had he not soon learned at how dear a cost that good fortune was bought? What could he think now, save that some new iniquity was in store—some wrongdoing, in which his innocent children were to become abettors, dragged into the mire, as Robert had been dragged by him ten years ago.

The thought was too bitter. As soon as dinner was over Mr. Ford rose, left the house, and walked off to Mr. George's office in the City.

Mr. George was busy writing in his private room, when he was told that Mr. Ford wanted to speak to him.

"Not Mr. Robert Ford, sir, but Mr. Ford's father."

"Mr. Ford's father!" and Mr. George threw himself back in his chair, turned up his eyes, and seemed to try and remember who Mr. Ford's father could be.

"Show him up," he said, at length. "I cannot say I recollect, but show him up, Barker."

Barker did as he was bid; and Mr. Ford's step was heard on the staircase, and Mr. Ford himself entered the room.

"I declare, Mr. Ford, I did not know who it was; Barker said 'Mr. Ford,' and I kept thinking of your son Robert—pray take a chair."

Mr. Ford remained standing, and Mr. Ford looked very stern.

"Sir," he said, "I understand you have been procuring my two younger sons situations."

"I am happy to say I have," replied Mr. George, virtuously.

"Pray, sir, may I ask what was your motive in doing so?"

Mr. George looked surprised. The question certainly was a strange one.

"Motive!" he repeated, looking round the room, as if in search of a stray motive. "I protest, Mr. Ford, you surprise me—what motive could I have, save that of rendering two deserving young men an essential service."

Mr. Ford set his teeth, and his brown eyes flashed angrily.

"Look you, sir," he said, in a low but angry voice, "I will have no meddling with these two boys. With the elder one I cannot interfere—he is beyond my power—you know why—but with these two innocent lads *you* shall not meddle. They, at least, do not know their father's sin, and need not suffer for his guilt."

"Mr. Ford, what have I to do with your family affairs?" asked Mr. George, a little impatiently; "all I know is, that your eldest son is a most deserving young man."

"Who said he was not?" defiantly interrupted Mr. Ford; "I tell you there is not one in a hundred like Robert Ford—I tell you I dare you to find a flaw in him—and I tell you that, though you are doing your best to corrupt him, as you corrupted his father, Robert Ford will come triumphant out of it all. Ay, do your best, or your worst," added Mr. Ford, with flashing eyes, "my boy's honour is beyond your reach."

Mr. George straightened his hands, and looked at the backs of them very attentively. His eyes were downcast, and there was a stealthy smile on his lips. Mr. Ford felt exasperated—he took two steps forward.

"Do you mean to say you have bought him?"

he asked, sternly ; “I tell you you cannot—you cannot !”

“Mr. Ford, you are losing your temper,” said Mr. George, with calm rebuke ; “may I ask what you came here for ?”

Mr. Ford cooled at once.

“I came here,” he replied, “to tell you this, that all you do against me is useless. You may get situations for my younger sons, you may raise Robert’s salary fifty pounds—I give up nothing. Nothing in this world shall conquer me—I will struggle to the death against you—and something tells me that I shall prevail—that you shall not live to enjoy much longer the fruit of your iniquity.”

“Mr. Ford,” said Mr. George, feelingly, “what have I to do with your family affairs, and, I am sorry to add, dissensions? I have done my best to serve your sons, and I do not regret it. The eldest is, as I said, a most deserving young man ; I have no doubt his brothers are like him—I hope to help them to good situations ; I have doubled his salary, not raised it fifty pounds, and, Mr. Ford, even though ingratitude should be my reward, I do not regret it.”

Mr. Ford looked stunned.

“You have doubled Robert’s salary !” he said.

"I have done so," complacently replied Mr. George.

"And what is it for?" asked the wretched father, his white lips trembling.

"Mr. Ford, you are most mysterious. What motive should I, an employer, have for doubling the salary of your son, my clerk? Of course he will have to work harder, he will also incur a certain responsibility; but you must excuse me, Mr. Ford, I know very, *very* little of *you*, though we are cousins. I cannot, I will not enter into any further explanations; I consider that my character is a sufficient one."

Mr. Ford seemed unable to reply. His nature was not one of habitual mistrust. He had not thought there was anything beyond the two situations of William and Edward; he had not suspected that so open a bargain had been struck between Mr. George and his son Robert, of whom he was so proud in his heart. The blow crushed him. He was not angry with Robert, that was not his feeling. No, the memory of his own iniquity, of Alicia's death-bed, of her wild lament over her innocent children, the sense of a curse which followed in his steps, and was even now being fulfilled in those dear to him, these were the things he could not bear. He rallied, however, so far as to look Mr. George firmly in the face, and to say in a clear, even voice:

"I suppose you triumph in your heart because the same arts which seduced the father have now in some measure prevailed over the son. But I tell you there is a difference, and that this time all you do shall not avail you. Never, with my consent, shall she forfeit one of her rights—never—and her at least you cannot reach—she will not sign a scrap of paper if I forbid it, and forbid it I do."

"Mr. Ford, must I request once more that you will be so kind as not to involve *me* in *your* family dissensions? I think it deplorable that you cannot rule your children, and should come to me with such extraordinary revelations—and again I say, what have *I* to do with it all?"

"God's justice is hanging over you," said Mr. Ford, looking hard at him.

"Profane!" murmured Mr. George, half closing his eyes.

"It is hanging over you, I say, and it will reach you before long. I tell you again that I stand between her and all harm. You cannot reach her unless through me, Mr. George; and do not attempt to touch her," he added, drawing so near to Mr. George that this gentleman thought proper to open his eyes rather quickly, "or if you do so, why, let it be at your peril. With regard to my sons," continued Mr. Ford in a cooler tone, "I repeat

what I have said, you may do what you please with the elder one; his integrity and judgment both place him beyond your reach; but with the younger ones, meddle if you dare, that's all. They shall beg their bread before they accept benefits from you."

So saying, Mr. Ford turned his back on Mr. George, and walked downstairs.

Mr. Ford had put on a brave front whilst he stood in the presence of his enemy, but when he crossed the dark street and reached the shelter of the old church, he stood still, and, leaning against the iron railings, he gave way to the anguish of his heart. Robert, his secret pride and darling, had fallen. William and Edward were safe; Mr. George would never dare to proceed in that matter, but Robert had yielded to the tempter.

"The father sold her for five hundred pounds, and the son for three hundred a year!"

Such was the weary burden of his vexed spirit. At length Mr. Ford rallied and walked on. He sought, and he found, excuses for Robert. After all, the poor boy only drove the best bargain he could; and if he derived benefit from it, he meant Mab to share it. Of course he did not know he was undoing all Mr. Ford had been striving to gain for years. Suppose he were to take him into his confidence, and they should both league against

Mr. George! But, no, that could not be. Robert meant well, of course; but he must know what he was about, or he would not have concealed the fact that his salary was doubled. Alone Mr. Ford had acted these ten years, and alone he must act to the last. Thus Mr. Ford reasoned, and he did not acknowledge to himself that the real motive of his silence was shame. Robert, indeed, knew the full depth and extent of his past transgressions, but there are things which are too hard to be put into words, and the story of how Mab came to Queen Square was such a one for Mr. Ford. He could not tell it again, he could not talk of what it was, at times, too bitter to remember.

On reaching home, Mr. Ford went up to his bedroom, and in it he breakfasted the next morning. Some time after his sons had left the house, he sent for Mab.

"Mab," he said to her, abruptly, "I have been thinking over that engagement—you must never marry Robert."

"What!" cried Mab, amazed.

"I say you must not marry him. You do not love him—he does not love you. It is all a mistake."

"But, uncle, how could we be mistaken?"

"Poor little innocent!" said Mr. Ford, laying his hand on her shoulder and looking compas-

sionately in her face. "I tell you he does not love you. Do you think I do not know when a man, and a man of twenty-three, too, loves a girl; let me tell you, Mab, it is not in that cold-blooded fashion."

But Mab was incredulous.

"Robert is very fond of me," she said, a little indignantly. "But he is not going to rave about a girl he has known all his life—of course not."

"Poor little innocent!" said Mr. Ford, again.

"But, uncle," said Mab, with tears in her eyes, "why should Robert wish to marry me if he does not like me."

"Ah! why?"

Mr. Ford knew why, but he could not tell Mab. He could not betray his own son, and with him his own weary secret.

"I repeat it," he resumed, "Robert does not love you, and you do not love him, and you shall not have my consent to marry until you are of age. I will protect you, Mab, against your own will."

"I am in no hurry to marry, indeed I am not," said Mab, reddening; "I am very young, and so is Robert, but indeed, uncle, we love each other truly."

"I know what love is," replied Mr. Ford, in a low tone, and with downcast eyes, and a strange sad smile on his lips, "and it is no use telling me

Robert loves you, and that you love Robert. I know better."

Mab was staggered, but not convinced.

"And you must promise not to marry Robert without my knowledge and permission," continued Mr. Ford; "and what is more, you must promise—solemnly promise—not to sign a scrap of paper without first consulting me."

Mab was much perplexed and astonished, but she gave the required promise. She knew before evening why Mr. Ford had exacted it: he went out, and a few hours after doing so came a letter from him, enclosing money. He had gone away again, but whither, or for how long a time, Mr. Ford did not say.

"He is in London," said Miss Lavinia. "He was in London before, watching me—I looked at his carpet bag, and could not discover one steam-boat or railway ticket upon it; besides, you know, he had not time to go to America and come back. I am convinced, Mab, your uncle was in London the whole time."

Mab tried to laugh, but how could she, with Mr. Ford's warnings haunting her?

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE dinner was a merry one, spite Mr. Ford's absence. William and Edward had rushed into the house with an eager, "What news?" To which Robert had answered with a "You pair of simpletons, do you suppose I brought home the situations to put them down your throats?"

This damped their ardour, but only for a while. William declared he had not made up his mind to accept; and Edward said he should think about it. Miss Lavinia looked bewildered, and remonstrated.

"My dear aunt," replied William, "we are amiable, but we are prudent. We will not make up our minds in a hurry."

Miss Lavinia sighed, and gently remarked, "that it was not wise to jest about the blessings of Providence."

"Very true," was Edward's answer; "but in

this case, aunt, it is we who happen to be the blessings."

Mab was struck with Robert's face; she knew how to read it, and, though he laughed, it was plain this jesting jarred with his mood.

"Something has happened," thought Mab. Something had happened, indeed, and when dinner was over, Robert managed to send both his brothers out, and to remain alone with Miss Ford, after Mab had gone up to her room. Having carefully closed the parlour door, he said gravely:

"Aunt, I have an important matter to discuss with Mab and you. I am more concerned than I can tell you, to find that my father has left us once more—I want to marry Mab."

"But you are already engaged to her, my dear Robert."

"Aunt, I want to marry her at once."

Miss Lavinia could not speak.

"Of course you are amazed. This is the case. Mr. George, besides giving my brothers two excellent situations, doubles my salary, and agrees to give Mab five hundred pounds on our wedding day."

Miss Ford's joy, though mute at first, soon became eloquent. Robert heard her out patiently, then said, in his calm way:

"These are great advantages, but they are sub-

ject to one condition—I must marry Mab within a week.”

Miss Lavinia’s breath was gone again.

“It happened thus,” pursued Robert; “after I had accepted, and gratefully enough, Mr. George’s kind offers, he asked me when I meant to marry. I replied in a few months. ‘In a few months,’ he repeated, quite sharply; ‘and do you suppose, Mr. Ford, I am going to give a responsible situation of three hundred a year to an unmarried man? Why, sir, I concluded your banns were published! I insist on an immediate union.’ The word ‘insist’ made me lose my temper. I answered—I know not what. The upshot of the whole was that Mr. George said, ‘Sir, if you are not married within ten days, you may look for three hundred a year elsewhere.’ I need not tell you what this means, aunt; if I lose my situation and the five hundred pounds, William and Edward also lose their hundred a year each. In short, it is our three-fold ruin! As you love me, help me to prevail over the opposition I expect from Mab.”

Miss Ford did not answer. She looked at him, then at the door, and Robert, turning round, saw Mab standing on the threshold of the room—the very image of dismay. He was not sorry that she had heard him, and that he had not to repeat the garbled narrative of what had passed between him and Mr. George.

Mab came forward, sat down, looked at her aunt, then at Robert.

"Robert!" she exclaimed, clasping her hands, and speaking impressively, "this is some dreadful mistake."

"I think so, too," said Miss Lavinia, rallying; "it is impossible."

"It is but too true," mournfully replied Robert.

"Robert," persisted Mab, "I cannot understand it at all. It really is no business of Mr. George's when we do marry, or even if we ever marry. I must not have understood you, or you must not have understood him. Tell me all that passed between you and him, and perhaps I shall be able to see through it all."

Mab could not have preferred a more inconvenient request, nor one with which Robert felt less inclined to comply. Indeed, it was impossible he should do so. Mr. George had not been very open—he never was so; but Mr. George and his clerk had understood each other thoroughly that morning. Mr. George had not gone so far as to tell him of Mr. Ford's visit; but he had said, in his paternal way—"Ford, I have been thinking it over. You must marry soon—very soon. I should be sorry to wound the feelings of a son, but in my opinion, Ford, both you and the amiable young person who is to become your bride, cannot with-

draw too soon from the influence at Queen Square. It is dangerous to your best interests. Indeed, so strongly do I feel on this subject, that I shall actually think myself justified in suspending the effect of my promises until you are married, or on the point of marriage. Let it be in a week, Ford, in a week."

Robert neither could nor did misunderstand this. Mr. George wanted to take Mab away from Mr. Ford's influence; and if he wanted that, it was proof that he intended exacting something very substantial indeed, in exchange for his promised benefits. Robert thought the opportunity a good one to raise his terms—for much would fain have more; but Mr. George's case was probably a stronger one than the young man had thought; for on the first hint he turned upon him with something like a snarl, and bade him make haste and be a married man, or give up all hopes of his employer's favour. These were not particulars which Robert could unfold to Mab and Miss Ford, and he therefore said, rather crossly :

"Really, Mab, you have a poor opinion of my judgment. There was no misunderstanding whatever, and the only question is, how soon can we get married?"

"Robert, it is impossible."

"Mab, you will think over it."

Mab shook her head.

"It is impossible."

"My dear," said Miss Ford, hesitatingly, "there is a great deal at stake."

"It is impossible," said Mab again; "before he left, uncle made me promise, solemnly promise, not to marry Robert without his consent. It would almost seem as if he foresaw this, and meant to prevent it."

"Of course he did," cried Robert, setting his teeth, and walking angrily about the room, as he saw all that Mr. George had not told him; "of course he did—he hates me—he hates his children—he has done it to ruin us."

"Oh! Robert, how can you talk so? He loves you very dearly, but it is nevertheless true that he does not wish me to become your wife just yet."

"And what will you do, Mab?"

"Robert, how can you ask?—I must obey him, of course."

"And so you will ruin those two poor boys, you will ruin me, to keep a most unjust promise. Oh! Mab, I did not think that of you."

"Robert, I cannot help it—what am I to do?"

"Mab, are you not pledged to me? Are you not to be my wife? Am I nothing? Is a pledge exacted from your tenderness to stand between the whole of our future happiness?"

"Not the whole!" she pleaded.

"Mab, you are no child! You know the value of money. I cannot marry without it, and I might wait years and not get such a situation. And the boys! You heard them at dinner. Have you the heart to do it?"

"Let me go to Mr. George's, Robert——"

"And get me dismissed on the spot. Thanks. You will drive me distracted!" he added.

Spite her sincere grief at displeasing him, Mab felt it was the three hundred pounds a year, and the five hundred pounds on the wedding day, and the situations of William and Edward, that distracted Robert; but his anger hurt her to the heart, and she remained silent.

"Mab," he said, in a much softer tone, "what do you decide?"

"My dear Robert," here put in Miss Lavinia, who had all this time been enduring the keenest struggles of conscience, "it is impossible—Mab has promised never to marry you without her uncle's consent, and she must not do it."

Robert darted a look full of reproach at Miss Ford, and with a cutting, "I did not expect that from *you*, aunt," he angrily walked out of the room, and, taking down his hat, left the house.

His anger cooled in the square; it cooled still more as he walked along the streets and thought

the matter over. Mab would not yield, that was plain; well, then, Mr. George must, that was all. And here the generous instincts and the sanguine spirit of youth came to his aid. It was humiliating, and Robert felt it, to abet Mab's wronger in any way, and Robert, being unable to do it, virtuously resolved that he would not; nay, more, he resolved that, since the battle had begun, it should end in Mr. George's defeat. In the meanwhile, there could be no harm in doing now what he had intended from the first, that is to say, in testing Mr. George's sincerity.

It was characteristic of Robert that he had no friends—but he had acquaintances. Amongst these was a Mr. Josiah Webster, a nervous, timid gentleman, who spent his days in an office in the city, and his evenings at home in his city chambers—in other words, in the second floor back bedroom of a house in a city square. The friends who came and passed an evening with him, sometimes committed a slip of the tongue, and bluntly called it a room; but Mr. Webster clung to the dignified plural, and, though too courteous to correct his guests in plain speech, he brought in his “chambers” in the next sentence; his obstinacy prevailed in time, and “Webster's chambers” became a fact.

There are some beings whom their complete in-

nocence saves from harm. They are the Unas of this world, and its roaring lions lie down at their feet, and lick them tenderly. Of these was Mr. Webster. It was impossible to hurt him. No one thought of doing it; his mild temper, his guileless heart, gave him the most precious of all impunities, that which is yielded voluntarily. Every one was kind and gentle to him, every one spared him, no one but would have been ashamed to have a rough word for "Little Josiah." But innocent though he was, Mr. Webster was known to possess a valuable amount of city information, which, being used most discreetly, often made him a useful person. All that could be known in the city Mr. Webster knew; perhaps because the city was his darling, and that no eyes are so keen and sure as the eyes of love.

"Little Josiah will know," thought Robert, and to the chambers he made his way. It was part of the agreement between the tenant of the chambers and the lady who held them at first-hand, that her hand-maiden, Mary Ann, was to open the street door; but there the bargain ended, and the visitors were left to grope their way up-stairs and to enter the chambers without being properly announced. This Mr. Webster, who had a terror of thieves, considered highly dangerous. He had argued with Mrs. Lerrick and with Mary Ann, but both

were so far blind to their own safety as to decline taking his view of the subject. Mr. Webster accordingly procured a patent Chubb's lock for his absence, and another patent, a steel chain, to be used when he was within. When Robert, therefore, after groping his way up, reached his door, and, giving it a preliminary knock, attempted to open it, he heard something rattle inside, and was asked, in Mr. Webster's stern tones, "who he was, and what he wanted." Robert named himself, and was admitted at once.

Mr. Webster's chambers were pleasant, though small. They abounded in the little selfish comforts dear to bachelors and old maids. Their neatness was admirable, yet they were very full. All sorts of shelves, brackets, and stands, held all sorts of treasure, chiefly scientific; for it was Mr. Webster's delight to accumulate a vast quantity of the most useless knowledge. He was a living cyclopaedia, whom no one ever cared to open, even for a moment. And Mr. Webster was neither surprised nor annoyed at this neglect. He was an intellectual miser, who acquired knowledge for the pure pleasure of hoarding it. This Robert knew without caring, in the least, about it; he was surprised, nevertheless, to find that, whilst it was still broad daylight in the streets, Mr. Webster's blinds and curtains were closely drawn, and that his lamp was lit.

"Yes," said Mr. Webster, noticing his look, "I like lamp-light, I find it favourable to concentration of thought."

"I suppose so," said Robert, taking a chair. "Where have you been all this time?"

"No where, thank Heaven! I am never so happy as in my chambers."

Robert gravely agreed that the chambers of his friend were such as to yield a large amount of happiness; and little by little, step by step, he led the discourse to Sampson's, and said, in his most careless tone,

"So they want a new clerk."

Now, with all Mr. Webster's simplicity of character, there mingled a certain amount of shrewdness. When he heard the name of Sampson, he knew why the young man had come; only he mistook his object in seeking for information.

"They did want a new clerk," he said, "but they were suited this morning."

"Thank you, Mr. George," indignantly thought Robert. "And Richards," he said, aloud.

"Richards! Oh! they want no one. They keep to the old set."

This was too much. The wretched old deceiver had attempted to cheat him in the most barefaced manner. Mr. Webster, who still mistook Robert's object, and who watched with concern his disturbed countenance, said soothingly,

"You may be sure that, should I hear of anything likely to suit you, I shall let you know in time."

Robert stared at him; then the truth suddenly flashed across his mind: Mr. George was going to give up business, and he had promised readily because promises cost him nothing.

Robert rose to his feet, burning with indignation and shame. True, he had meant to ask for and to exact security, but would not Mr. George have deceived him in that too? Of course he would.

Oh! what a dupe!—what a miserable dupe he had nearly been.

"Does Mr. George make no provision for his employés on leaving business?" asked Mr. Webster.

"Excellent provision!" replied Robert, laughing bitterly; "he wanted to provide me with a wife! And it is eight now, is it not?—just eight—then I must go, and settle the matter with him. Good night."

He walked out abruptly, leaving Mr. Webster much surprised at Mr. James George's match-making tendency.

"I'm a ruined man," thought Robert, when he found himself alone in the street. "Mr. George would never have attempted to deceive me so shamelessly, if he were not proof against me. He would have made me marry Mab, sign away her rights, and then laughed at me."

It was very hard to think of this. It was very hard, too, to feel that at twenty-three he was going to be cast forth on that London world where it is so difficult or so easy to make one's way. Robert had a bitter and uneasy consciousness that, when weighed according to the severe standard of merit, he would be found deficient ; that he had not been in the best of schools, and that to leave Mr. George's office was, in itself, no recommendation. And, as he felt all this, his heart swelled with secret resentment against his father. Why had he ever accepted for him that situation, which was the price of his sin, and which had led him into the temptation that now proved his undoing ? Of course if he had been in another house, thrown on himself, and not aware, as he had been, that his employer dare not cast him off, he would have grown up a different man. He would have acquired a sounder knowledge of business, striven to rise through other means than the possession of a guilty secret.

"Who knows, though, when he finds me a match for him, whether the man's fears will not make him give in ?" thought Robert, forgetting in a moment all his anger against his father, and falling back with the readiness of habit into the old track. "I can tell you, Mr. George, that you shall not prevail without a contest."

"Mr. George is out," said the porter who opened to Robert.

"I shall wait for him," answered the young man, and he went up to the office, as if he had business there.

On the staircase he met Mrs. Smith. She stood aside to let him pass, and Robert, courteous and kind as ever, stopped to ask how she was.

She gave him a wild, scared look, and replied, in a low, moaning voice,

"It is wrong, all wrong, Mr. Ford."

"What is wrong, Mrs. Smith?" he asked, with some surprise.

She shook her head, and wrung her hands.

"It is a judgment," she said; "a judgment—the Bible says so, Mr. Ford, and every word of the Bible is true."

Robert had never exchanged ten words with Mrs. Smith before, and he began to think that her mind was affected.

"Mr. George will soon come in, I suppose," he said, endeavouring to pass on.

"Soon," and she looked wildly at him, and shook her head most drearily. Robert gave up all hopes of understanding her. He felt that something had happened, but what it was he could not imagine. Barker, the messenger, knew nothing, save that a letter had come this evening, and that,

on receiving it, Mr. George had risen from his dinner, called for a cab in great agitation, and gone off no one knew whither.

After waiting some time, Robert was rising to go, resolving to delay his explanation until the next morning, when he heard Mr. George's voice below. He nerved himself for the coming encounter, and armed himself with coolness as Mr. George's step was heard coming up the stair-case; but the step passed by the door, and went up to the second floor. A door opened, and then closed, and Robert even heard a bolt pushed to, and a key turn in the lock; after which a heavy foot began pacing to and fro in the room above with monotonous regularity. He bit his lip—it was plain Mr. George would not see him this evening. It did not matter much; the next day would do as well. As he left the room, and walked out on the landing, Robert met Mrs. Smith again. She held up her forefinger in token of silence, and whispered in a voice so low as to be almost inaudible:

“Will you wait for me round the church, Mr. Ford?”

“Certainly,” replied Robert; and though much surprised at so singular a request, he showed no astonishment.

There was a narrow passage which led round the old church to another street behind it; and

that street leading to Holborn was one which Robert often took. He now turned round the church as usual, and leaning against the railings of the church-yard, he looked at the tombstones within with secret loathing. Robert was not sentimental, but to be buried beneath one of those dark mounds of earth! Faugh! the mere thought was sickening! Yet, as Mrs. Smith was not coming, he read the inscriptions on the dingy gas-lit stones. One especially caught his eye :

A N N R H O D E,

AGED EIGHTEEN.

There was no date, no text, no hope of resurrection, and a better life. It was youth and death meeting on that narrow ground, and youth was conquered, and death triumphant. Robert thought of Mab, so young, so fresh, so fair, so charming! What if such a fate were to overtake her, and lead her to such a grave!

A deep sigh behind him made him look round. He saw Mrs. Smith, whose sad eyes had been reading the same epitaph, and whose pale lips repeated mechanically :

“Aged eighteen!” and she looked at him almost pitifully.

“You had something to say to me,” remarked Robert.

"I have," she answered, with another sigh. "Oh! Mr. Ford, I am taking a great liberty, but you have a kind face, and perhaps you will do this for me. There is no one else—no one, indeed, to whom I dare apply."

"What is it, Mrs. Smith?" asked Robert, in his kindest tones. He was kind by nature; he was young, too, and accessible to the voice of praise and entreaty.

"The young lady you took tea once with is ill—ill or dying. Mr. George got the news this evening. He would not tell me what it was, but I guessed it. He went to see her, and came back pale as death; and though I begged and prayed for one word, he locked himself up in his own room, and would not answer me. Mr. Ford, I reared that child—that young lady, I mean; if she were my own, I could not love her more than I do. It cuts me to the heart not to know—and I dare not go and ask after her—Mr. George would never forgive me. Oh! if you would—if you would but inquire," added Mrs. Smith, clasping her hands, and looking in his face with piteous entreaty.

"Certainly," replied Robert; "but in what name—in my own I cannot."

"I have thought of that," she eagerly replied; "if you will but call a cab I shall explain it to you."

Robert hesitated; but in her pitiful voice she said again,

“Oh! do, Mr. Ford—do, for the love of heaven!”

Robert yielded; an empty cab was passing, he hailed it; Mrs. Smith entered first, telling the cabman where to drive, and Robert followed her in. He asked at once for the promised explanation.

“Yes, yes, I know,” she eagerly replied, “you must inquire how Miss Redmond is in the name of Mrs. Smith.”

“In your name?”

“It is my name; but there is another Mrs. Smith, who knows Miss Redmond well, and has been kind to her. She has a son about your age, and they will conclude you are that son—you see.”

Robert saw he was embarked in no very pleasant matter, and though he was too kind to recede, he could not help asking why Mrs. Smith could not make the inquiry herself.

“I dare not,” she whispered; “I went once, just to see her, and Mr. George knew it, and threatened to turn me out if I ever went near her again, and they know me, so I cannot go; oh! Mr. Ford, if I could, if I could even ask any one else to do this, would I have dared to trouble you?”

Robert bade her not distress herself, and no more was said until they both reached the end of their journey, Clarendon House.

It was an old brick mansion, built in the days of Queen Elizabeth, and which, after passing through the hands of many a lordly owner, had now become a fashionable boarding school. Heavy and solemn-looking trees grew around the ancient house; the grounds and garden were vast, and a farm was even attached to them. Stateliness characterized an abode which, if tradition spoke truly, had been regal in the days when miles of country separated London from places that have since become its suburbs. Robert alone alighted from the cab, and rang the bell; through the bars of the iron gate he could see the brown, ivy-covered front of the building, with its small-paned windows and stone porch, and tall square chimneys. A porter came out of a lodge, and, looking at Robert, inquired his business, without attempting to admit him.

"I came to ask how Miss Redmond is this evening."

"In whose name?"

"Mrs. Smith's."

"I shall go and inquire, sir, but I cannot let you in, it is against the rules; you must wait here, if you please."

He went to the house as he spoke, and returned in about five minutes.

"Very bad news, sir," he said; "Miss Redmond has diphtheria, and is not expected to live."

Robert was shocked ; a low moan from the cab told him Mrs. Smith had heard all. He entered it hastily, and bade the cabman drive them back to the spot where he had taken them up, for the porter looked curiously at the vehicle, with evidently aroused suspicions.

Mrs. Smith was pale as death, and shook in every limb.

"It is a judgment," she said several times, "it is a judgment."

It was a judgment; Robert felt it such, and no words of consolation could rise to his lips.

"Here we are, sir," said the cabman as they reached the old church. It was night now, for they had had a long drive, but the grey stones of the graves still glimmered in the flickering gaslight. Mrs. Smith alighted without a word ; she left Robert to discharge the cabman and pay the reckoning ; she did not even thank him ; she staggered away, reeling with anguish.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE church clock struck eleven as Robert stood alone in the silent street. He counted the strokes one by one, hoping to cool the fever of his blood. The great crisis was at hand ; he was destined after all to be Mab's avenger, and to become the instrument of that Providence which was chastising Mr. George so sorely. He knew the child would die ; he did not wish for her death, though he speculated upon it, but he knew she would die. He felt it, and on that certainty he built. She would die, and with her would perish her father's strength. Mr. George should purchase immunity at the cheap cost of disinheriting a brother whom he detested ; for the present, however, there was nothing to be done. He had waited years, he could wait a few days longer. In the meanwhile he would say nothing at home, "and I do hope they

are not sitting up for me," he thought, as he turned towards Queen's Square.

Vain hope! Although William and Edward had assured her, with the strong nerves of their sex, "that it was all right," and had gone to bed, Miss Lavinia would be uneasy at Robert's absence, and Mab, who sat up with her, shared, if not her anxiety, at least her saddened mood. She had never before had a serious disagreement with "dear Robert," and she felt this sorely. She ran and opened for him when his welcome knock was heard at the door, and looking up appealingly in his face, she said,

"Do not be angry with me, Robert, do not."

"Angry, my dearest Mab! it is you who should not be angry with me. I urged you too much."

To Miss Lavinia, who came out in tears, Robert generously held out his hand. She would willingly have kissed it. Dear, excellent Robert, he had forgiven them! Robert hastened to get out of the reach of this unseasonable gratitude. He could not bear to hear Mab and his aunt thanking him for not having succeeded in making Mab break the solemn promise, which, though he knew it not, was to save him from becoming Mr. George's dupe. He hurried up-stairs, pleading fatigue, and, to avoid all troublesome explanations with his brothers, he left early the next morning and

breakfasted at a coffee-house on his way to the office.

Mr. George was out—Robert could guess where, and on what errand. Mr. George remained out all day, and Robert worked alone. Mrs. Smith knocked once at his door and came in, with her sad and anxious look.

“Mr. Ford,” she entreated, “will you go again this evening?”

To do Robert justice, there was no thought of self mingling in his reply:

“Indeed I will.” But he could not help adding, “I suppose Mr. George is there?”

“He is—he went this morning, and he has not come back. Mr. Ford, do you really think she will die?”

She looked most pitifully in his face, imploring consolation. Robert could not answer, he did not think the child would live, and he was not skilled in the task of administering fallacious hopes to sick and aching hearts. She understood his silence, and left the room without another word. Robert waited half-an-hour beyond his time, still Mr. George did not come back. It was useless to remain: he rose, locked his desk, and went downstairs. Half-way on the staircase he met Mrs. Smith.

“What shall we do?” she whispered. “Oh! Mr. Ford, what shall we do?”

Robert was going to reply by making an appointment with her in the vicinity of the boarding-school, when a cab was heard stopping at the door. Without a word Mrs. Smith swiftly descended, to read her doom in a look. Robert followed her more slowly, but with the same object—he, too, wanted to know.

Mr. George was alighting from the cab. Robert never forgot his face. It was not so much pale as ghastly. Here sorrow had been conquered by despair, the despair of some wild animal robbed of its young. No need of a second look—all was over, over for ever in this world. Mrs. Smith stared at her master, mute in her piteous misery. Robert's heart sickened as he witnessed their double agony. Mr. George did not see them at first; it may be that he saw nothing just then, that all external objects lost their power over his dulled sense.

"Close the shutters, Barker," he said, hoarsely.
"Mrs. Smith."

"Yes, sir."

"Draw down the blinds."

Mrs. Smith passively went up-stairs to obey. Mr. George looked at Robert, who was leaving the house. Robert stopped.

"Shall I come to-morrow, sir?" he asked.

Mr. George's eyes kindled. He looked as if he

would have liked to rend him to pieces, and in a savage tone he answered :

“Yes—what are you paid for?”

Robert scorned to resent the insolent tone and words—there are moments when our worst enemy is weak to offend us as a little child.

Robert’s explanation to his brothers, that evening, was comprised in the words, “Mr. George has lost a near relative,” and Mab and Miss Lavinia had to be satisfied with this too—for Robert had never taken them so far into his confidence as to tell them a word of Mr. George’s private history. Robert and Mr. George did not meet on the following day, and the young man had little or nothing to do save to read the newspaper. Mr. George’s business was most elastic. Robert had always known that, in point of fact, it was little better than a screen for secret transactions, the nature of which he was shrewd enough to divine, though they had never been brought too closely under his notice ; and now that he knew Mr. George’s intentions, he could not wonder at the inaction in which he was left. Thus passed three days, during which Robert sat idly at his desk, with even the prospect of the old church excluded by the yellow blinds, and with nothing to engage his mind but the arguments, or, better still, the policy that should prevail over the remorseless craft of Mr. George.

On the morning of the fourth day they met. Was the funeral over, or had something occurred which compelled Mr. George's attention to business? Robert did not find him so much altered as he had expected. Mr. George's features were rigid and pale, but his manner was cool, and, if anything, more collected than usual. He spoke to Robert precisely as if nothing had ever taken place, and was so clear-headed and business-like, that the young man resolved to bring the matter in his thoughts to a speedy issue. But on the first words he uttered, Mr. George rose, looked at his watch, and drily saying, "I have an appointment," he left the room, and Robert saw him no more that day.

"He mistrusts me," thought the young man; "I must compel him to listen the next time we meet."

Everyone at Queen Square noticed his abstracted manner that evening. Robert was convinced now that Mr. George meant to escape him, and he was obliged to confess inwardly that he could do so very easily. Now then was the time for ready wit, and skill, and daring; for if the golden hour went by, and Mr. George once got out of his reach, Robert felt he had neither the means nor the inclination to follow his victim. That Mr. George had deluded him all along, and intended

flight, Robert felt certain. He only wondered that so evident a fact had never occurred to him.

He was sitting alone in the garden, perplexing himself with these thoughts, when Miss Lavinia came to him with startled looks, sufficiently explained by the nature of her message. A lady in deep mourning, with a thick crape veil, was in the hall, waiting there to speak to Robert. She had refused to enter the parlour, and would not tell her name. Robert rose hastily, went to the hall, where the stranger still stood, and after exchanging a few words with her, he took down his hat, and they walked out together. Miss Ford remained speechless. The staid and sober Robert walking out with an unknown lady!

“What is it, Mrs. Smith?” asked Robert, when they stood in the square.

Instead of answering, Mrs. Smith wept and sobbed so violently, that she was obliged to lean against the railings.

“It will soon be over,” she gasped; “it will soon be over, Mr. Ford; but oh!—it was such a judgment!”

Robert did not say one word; he allowed her to grow calm. He was prepared to listen, but he was resolved not to question. He did not think Mrs. Smith was acting a part—but Mr. George might discover her absence, question her, and perhaps in-

dict Robert for conspiracy. Everything was possible with such a man.

"Mr. Ford," said Mrs. Smith, when she was more composed, "you know something of the young lady's history."

"What young lady?"

"At your house, sir."

"I?" exclaimed Robert.

"I am sure you do, or he would not hate and fear you so."

Robert said nothing, but thought this was good to know.

"I know I can trust you," she resumed; "I am sure you will not betray me, and I can tell you enough without betraying him either; for I must not—I cannot do that. All I want, Mr. Ford, is that the poor young lady should get that half of her fortune which Captain George did not have. He will have plenty of money left, and it is not good for his soul to have that."

Robert knew that fifteen thousand pounds lying by ten years with interest and compound interest would not make so small a portion of Mr. George's fortune as Mrs. Smith imagined, but he did not think it needful to enlighten her. He kept firm to his resolve not to speak.

"Mr. Ford," she asked, "what do you know?"

"The question is not what I know," said Robert, coldly; "but what you have to tell me."

Mrs. Smith shrank from him timidly.

"You mistrust me," she said; "well—no matter; it is but right I should suffer. Oh! if the judgment had not been worse than that! Oh! if I could have kept it away by speaking sooner."

She moaned aloud, and wrung her hands. Robert was touched, but he would not commit himself.

"At least you know her name?" she resumed.

"There is no need to mention names," quickly interrupted Robert; "have you facts to state?—that is the question."

"I cannot—I dare not tell you much," she whispered, "it would ruin him—and I must not do that; but if I tell you what will make him give up the money, will it not do?"

"As you please," was all Robert said.

"And even that I can only tell you on condition," she whispered again; "you must promise to use the knowledge as I shall tell you—in no other way; I know I can rely on your word—do you promise?"

"I do," replied Robert, after a pause.

"Well, then, you will tell him this—bring it in as you like—'What has become of Widow Lawrence's child?' and if that will not do, say something about Westdean Lodge; but mind you say no more—for if he finds you are really ignorant,

he will laugh at you, and scorn you. Mind you say no more, Mr. Ford."

"That will never do, Mrs. Smith," decisively replied Robert; "I cannot act in the dark. I am willing to say no more than you wish—but I must know the meaning of my own words."

"I cannot—I dare not!" said Mrs. Smith, seeming terrified.

"Well, then, let it be as if you had not spoken."

She wrung her hands again.

"He must not keep that money," she said; "he must not, Mr. Ford, or the dreadful judgment will reach him, too."

Robert did not answer, but waited. In vain; Mrs. Smith could not decide on speaking more openly. He felt sure she would yield in the end, but he chose to act as if he thought she would not.

"You will think over it, Mrs. Smith," he said, quietly. "Good evening."

"No, no," she cried, eagerly, seizing his arm, "I cannot let you go, Mr. Ford, I cannot. What is it you want to know?"

"I want to know nothing; but I will not speak on the authority of the words you have uttered—no man in his senses would."

"I suppose not. Besides, I know you mistrust me."

Again Robert was moved, but prudence forbade him to relent.

"All I can tell you is this," said Mrs. Smith, speaking with a violent effort, "and I suppose I have a right to say it—for, God forgive me, I was the guilty one. There was a Widow Lawrence, I will not tell you where she lived, nor yet her real name, for it was not Lawrence. She had a consumptive child, and that child died under the name of another—do you understand?"

"Quite well."

"As to Westdean Lodge, I will not say more about it than that it was the name two brothers gave a large old house where they kept a child. But its real name I will not tell you."

"With whom was the child?" asked Robert, questioning for the first time.

"With me."

"With you alone?"

"With me, and another who is dead. God forgive her, and forgive me, wretched miserable sinner!"

"Then it was you who took the child and left it at our door?"

"It was. Oh! God forgive me! it was a dreadful thing! And see, Mr. Ford, God's judgment overtook me. I had wronged a child, and a child suffered. Oh! what had *she* done? Why did the

judgment fall upon her? Oh! Mr. Ford, was it just? Don't answer. I am talking wickedness. And now, mind your promise, say no more than I told you——"

"Stop," interrupted Robert, "will you not be suspected?"

"I do not think so. I am not the only one who knew these things—he may think you got the information otherwise—by looking for it, perhaps. And even if I were suspected, what matter about me? Is it not right *I* should suffer? Oh! why did I not speak earlier? And now, Mr. Ford," she added, growing calm again, "mind my last words, see Mr. George *to-night*. If you see him and speak to him, you are all right—he will not stir out, see him *to-night*."

She did not wait for Robert's answer, but left him swiftly, going down Great Ormond Street.

For an hour and more Robert walked about the square. Never had conscience, greed, and prudence striven so hard for mastery as they now did in this young man's soul. It was a fearful contest. Every now and then his better nature prevailed, and made him turn back to the house where his conscientious aunt and innocent little Mab sat waiting for him. It was shameful, and he felt it, to use falsehood and deceit even to Mr. George. But then it was hard to allow the guilty man to escape

with his booty, and to condemn Mab, his victim, to poverty. From the moment that Robert took this view of the subject, his scruples lessened, until they vanished. Without further hesitation he turned towards Holborn, and he never stopped until he stood at Mr. George's door. The house was very dark and silent, yet steps within came down in answer to his loud ring; the door was unbarred and unlocked, and Mr. George himself appeared on the threshold, with a candle in his hand. He did not ask what brought Robert at so unusual an hour; he let him in, locked and bolted the door behind him, then walked upstairs without uttering a word. "He guesses why I have come," thought Robert, following him; and perhaps Mr. George did guess, perhaps something in Robert's face, or some secret intuition of his own heart, told him what brought the young man to him that evening. But even when they reached the official rooms, Mr. George did not question; he sat down in his arm-chair, leaned back, and joining the tips of his fingers, rested his chin upon them, looking at Robert with a cool fixed glance, but still without speaking. Robert's attack was prompt and open:

"Mr. George," he said, "may I remind you of the promise you made with regard to my brothers?"

"The situations are no longer in my gift," calmly

replied Mr. George; "but it shall make no difference—I will take your brothers on the same terms."

Robert smiled scornfully, and did not perceive that Mr. George wanted to ascertain how much he knew.

"Mr. George," he said, "my brothers cannot accept the position you offer them. They are not suited to it."

"Just so," replied Mr. George.

"And to be plain with you, I do not think you want them."

"Well, perhaps I do not, Ford, perhaps I do not."

"I even doubt if you want me, Mr. George. I have been told you are relinquishing business."

Mr. George arched his eyebrows, but gave no other answer.

"So you see, Mr. George," continued Robert, speaking rather sharply, "we have been proceeding on an erroneous basis altogether."

"Just so," placidly said Mr. George—"just so."

Robert was silent.

"On what basis do you suggest that we should act?" inquired Mr. George, after a pause.

Robert smiled.

"That, sir," he replied, "I leave to you."

They exchanged two long looks of hatred and

defiance ; then Mr. George, probably feeling sure of his ground, rose, and, pointing to the door, said sharply,

“That, sir, is my answer. Begone—and show your face here no more.”

Robert had stood the whole time ; he was leaning with his back to the fireplace, not far from Mr. George’s chair ; he now smiled without moving.

“Why, no,” he said, “that will not do, Mr. George—that will never do. Since you cannot find the right basis on which to act, I must help you. Let our basis be Widow Lawrence’s child—or, if that will not answer, Westdean Lodge.”

Mr. George stared at him, like one bewildered.

“I—I do not understand,” he faltered, without the least attempt at presence of mind.

“Then I fear it is a hopeless case,” replied Robert, taking his hat.

“Stop!—stop!” cried Mr. George ; “Mr. Ford, do not go ! I entreat you not to go, Mr. Ford.”

Mr. Ford kindly allowed himself to be persuaded.

“Take a chair, I beg,” continued Mr. George, in great trepidation ; “take a seat.”

“Thank you,” replied Robert, smiling. “A few seconds will do to settle our business.”

This brevity seemed to alarm Mr. George greatly; he, no doubt, suspected that a matter which was to be settled in so short a space of time, must, perforce, be settled to his disadvantage. He frowned and set his teeth, whilst Robert, in a thoroughly cool and easy tone, resumed:

“You are a rich man, Mr. George, yet with a portion of your wealth I do not meddle. With another portion I do. I expect—nay, I exact—that it shall be settled on Miss Winter.”

“In my will, of course,” interrupted Mr. George.

“No—not in your will: now, during your lifetime, Mr. George; and settled by a deed you shall have no power to cancel. I need not tell you why—Miss Winter is connected——”

“That will do!” again interrupted Mr. George.

“I do not ask whether you agree to this,” significantly resumed Robert; “of course you do—you cannot refuse. Besides this, I shall expect—always, be it understood, out of that portion of your fortune—that you shall present Miss Winter with the sum of ten thousand pounds in ready money. Or, if you prefer it, that you shall secure to her the interest of that sum, the capital to be invested in the public funds, under our joint superintendence.”

Mr. George breathed hard, for he expected

more ; but Robert, taking his hat again, kindly relieved him by saying,

“That is all, Mr. George. You cannot say that I am unjust, unreasonable, or self-seeking, in what I am doing ; but do not deceive yourself, the purer my motives are, the more rigid shall I be in exacting the fulfilment of the terms I have laid down. To-morrow morning at eight I shall be here, and I shall expect this matter to be either settled, or at least far advanced. I need not tell you that it would be futile and, perhaps, dangerous, to attempt evading me.”

Mr. George did not answer. He looked crushed and powerless. Defeat was written in his face, and Robert read it there clearly and plainly. Yet Mr. George made an attempt, a very futile one, to escape his tormentor.

“I have another appointment to-morrow,” he said, after a pause ; “come in the evening, Mr. Ford.”

Robert smiled.

“Mr. George,” he observed, very calmly, “I shall come to-morrow morning at eight. And take my advice—do not leave this house to-night.”

Mr. George gave him a scared look. Fear, abject fear, was stamped on that haggard countenance. Robert walked downstairs, with the feeling of conquest and triumph full upon him ; and it

was justified. Mr. George was beaten, and could not rally ; he was by no means a bold, bad man. With him strength and concealment were synonymous, and when concealment failed, strength gave way to shameful weakness.

CHAPTER XX.

THERE is a story which always has taken a strong hold of the popular mind—the story in which one man, seemingly endowed with the powers of Providence, becomes the righteous avenger of the oppressed, and pitilessly crushes the wronger in all the insolence of his strength. Some such story now seemed fulfilled for Robert Ford. In one half hour he had accomplished the object after which his father had vainly striven for years. Mab indeed must remain Mab Winter, and one half of her inheritance was lost, but the other half, in itself a handsome fortune, was within his grasp. With exultation and pride, too, Robert looked back over his own conduct ; he was making Mab a rich woman to his own cost. He had struck no selfish, no dishonourable bargain ; he had exacted restitution, and nothing more. “She can marry Frederick

Norton if she likes," thought Robert as he walked down the street; "I will take no mean advantage of her promise. 'Mab,' I will say to her, 'you are free; you are a rich woman now, it would not be honourable in me to bind you to a promise you made when we were both poor. Moreover, my pride will not allow me to marry an heiress when I am penniless; and whether your feelings change or remain what they are, we must proceed on a new basis.' The word basis, which had lately been used in the brief dialogue between Robert and Mr. George, recalled the young man's thoughts to business. He looked around him. He was not far from Chancery Lane, and in that legal neighbourhood precisely was it expedient that he should be, in order to get hold of Mr. Samuel Long. This gentleman was clerk to an eminent solicitor, and Robert believed him to possess a considerable knowledge of the law. He knew him more intimately than Mr. Josiah Webster, and justly had the highest opinion of his integrity and discretion. But Mr. Long spent his evenings out, and Robert called on him, prepared with an appointment for an early hour the next morning. Fortune, however, which is said to favour the brave, now so far favoured Robert Ford, as to confine to his room, with a severe cold, the individual whom he was seeking.

"Here I am in my attic," said Mr. Long, as Robert entered the very comfortable room on the second floor of a respectable house near Lincoln's Inn, which he thus ignominiously designated. For though Mr. Long had no personal acquaintance with Mr. Josiah Webster, he was as great a contrast to that gentleman as if it had been the purpose of his life to be such. He called his room an attic, he disliked science, he was fond of good living, and he scorned the conventionalities. He wore shabby clothes, and took pride in them; and he talked so much about his poverty, that many people were convinced he was to come in to something handsome.

This was Samuel Long in his private capacity; but there was a professional Samuel Long, who was a very different sort of fellow indeed from the private one, and him Robert Ford now sought. He had no time to lose in finessing, and at once came to the purpose.

"Have some grog," said Mr. Long. "I take it on principle: the best thing for a cold."

"Have you been taking much of it?" uneasily asked Robert.

"Why, no, only a glass or two. Why so?"

"My dear Long, I want your assistance on some most urgent business."

"Legal?"

Robert nodded.

Mr. Long shook his head and looked extremely grave. The intimacy of professional men is rarely favourable to a high amount of reverence for the profession they represent. Doctors, for instance, are the most reckless of men, and act as if medicine were the merest fiction; but no one could charge Mr. Long with slighting the law, or holding it up to the contempt of his friends by the slight value he set upon it. The law was a subject on which he did not speak willingly, and on which he was never explicit.

"You don't know the law," was his invariable reply to those persons who made light of it in his presence. Mr. Long did not say that he loved, feared, admired, or despised the law himself; but he never lost an opportunity of impressing his hearers with the fact that the law was a great thing. Accordingly, when Robert nodded, to imply that he had come on legal business, Mr. Long looked extremely grave; and, after a pause, said, in a tone of solemn condolence:

"I am sorry to hear it, my dear fellow."

"The business is not exactly my own," answered Robert.

Mr. Long extended his hand.

"Stop at once, have nothing to do with it," he exclaimed, emphatically. "You are safe yet, stop at once, I say."

"I cannot stop, Long."

"Poor fellow! Well, go on, then."

"You know, I dare say, Miss Winter's singular history!"

"I have heard it related; but, excuse me, Ford, it is by no means singular. There are dozens such come constantly in our way."

"I have no doubt about it; but pray hear me."

"Go on," said Mr. Long again, stretching out his hand, but this time towards his glass; Robert, however, quietly removed it.

"No, no, Long, please," he said briefly, "I tell you it is most important business."

Mr. Long looked resigned. Robert continued:

"I cannot tell you Miss Winter's real name, though I know it; suffice it to say that she is, or was, an heiress, and was put out of the way ten years ago."

"You will never be able to prove it," said Mr. Long. "I defy you to prove it. I defy a man to prove anything."

"I shall not try, my dear fellow; but do hear me out."

"Go on."

"Well, part of her property is in the hands of my employer, Mr. George."

Mr. Long whistled.

"Of course this is confidential," said Robert.

"Of course it is."

"Well, Mr. George, on becoming aware of his unpleasant position, has had qualms of conscience. He wishes to restore Miss Winter her property, but in a private though sure way, and, not choosing to trouble his solicitors, has applied to me to procure him the sort of deed he wants. Mr. George also wishes Miss Winter to enjoy the interest of a certain sum during his lifetime. This, too, requires to be settled by to-morrow morning, and this is the business that brings me to you."

"Too bad, Ford," feelingly said Mr. Long, "too bad. You actually want to *do* me. To talk of Mr. George's conscientiousness! I call it unprincipled to attempt to deceive your legal adviser. However, I will advise you. Make haste and get out of this dangerous affair."

"Mr. George is a coward," said Robert, dropping all feint, "an arrant coward!"

"Then you are lost—lost! You don't know the law. Get out of it."

Robert was staggered; he hesitated, then stamped his foot, half angrily:

"Nonsense. I know the man, I tell you," he said, "and he dare not resist or draw back. I tell you he dare not."

"You say he is a coward, and I tell you a coward will dare and do anything to get rid of

danger. Besides, do you suppose he will not get advice, legal advice?"

"I tell you, Long, his case is too black to be told by him to living creature."

"My dear Ford, this is nonsense, dreadful nonsense. That man will hide nothing—nothing from his legal adviser, and he will ruin you. Marry a beggar, Ford, rather than Miss Winter, with such a dowry."

Robert reddened. He had not told Mr. Long that he wished to marry Mab, but that gentleman gave him a proof of his legal acumen in taking the fact as granted. After this, concealment might be pernicious. He, accordingly, with as little disguise as his pride allowed, related the whole story, exactly as it had occurred. Mr. Long was horrified.

"Why, it is worse, much worse, than I thought," he exclaimed. "Good heavens! Ford, why did you not come to me at once, and I would have told you in a moment: don't meddle in anything of the kind."

"I am afraid I should not have followed your advice," impatiently replied Robert; "for even now I will not follow it, and that is the long and the short of it."

"I never knew such infatuation!" exclaimed Mr. Long, "never!"

Robert rose.

"I am sorry to have troubled you," he said, shortly, "but, as you cannot assist me, and as I have no time to lose, I must apply elsewhere."

"Sit down," resignedly answered Mr. Long, "it is cruel of me to yield, quite cruel, but you will have it so. Sit down and tell me again the whole story."

Robert sat down and told him everything once more. He also explained his views more fully. When he ceased, Mr. Long said, ruefully :

"Is that all?"

"All," emphatically answered Robert.

"Well, you know my opinion—I need not repeat it. You are a ruined man! However, you will have it so. Come to-morrow morning, early. Good night, Ford."

Thus they parted—Mr. Long deeply depressed at his friend's gloomy prospects, Robert secretly disturbed at the dangers of the enterprise on which he was embarked. The triumphant mood in which he had left Mr. George had subsided. Success no longer seemed so probable; and some of the perils which, in the course of their lengthened conversation, Mr. Long had pointed out, were sufficiently evident to startle Robert, spite his ignorance of the law.

He walked about I ncoln's Inn in a state of much agitation. Should he withdraw from this

undertaking—should he persist in it? After an hour spent in secret debate, Robert resolved on persevering. Come what would, Mr. George should not prevail over him without having had to fight a hard battle for the victory. He felt somewhat calmer as he came to this decision, and turned homewards. He reached Queen Square as twelve struck. It was Mab who opened to him.

“Oh! Robert!” she exclaimed, “what a fever of anxiety we have been in—and how dreadfully ill you look! Has anything happened?”

“Nothing, my dear—I am tired.”

“Robert, there is something—what is it?”

“Nothing—it will be over to-morrow.”

Miss Lavinia, who had been crying in the parlour, came out, and looked wistfully at him; but Robert, hastily bidding her a good evening, went up to his room, beyond the reach of questioning eyes.

The two women exchanged looks. Ay, something had happened, but what could it be? It did not lessen the alarm of Miss Ford, whose room was near Robert's, to hear him walk about all night. She got up early, and, stealing in to Mab, who was still fast asleep, she wakened her gently. Mab opened her eyes, and leaning upon one elbow, looked at Miss Lavinia's pale face with much surprise.

"My dear," said the elder lady, "dear Robert did not go to bed last night; you are quite right, something has happened. You must get up, and have a talk with him this morning; perhaps he will have confidence in you."

Mab looked very serious.

"He will tell me nothing, aunt," she replied; "but I shall do as you wish."

She rose, dressed herself, and went and tapped at Robert's door. He asked from within what it was.

"I want you in the garden," answered Mab; and, without waiting for a reply, she went down. She sat on the bench, and waited there with a beating heart until Robert appeared. He came and sat by her, and, smiling, quietly asked what she wanted.

"I want to know what ails you, Robert?—what has happened?—what is it?"

"I cannot tell you, Mab," he replied, after a pause; "to-morrow I dare say I shall be free to speak, but this day—I cannot and will not disguise it from you—is a momentous day in your history and in mine. Whatever happens, Mab, remember that I acted for the best, and if the world should turn against me, you will be just to me, I know."

Mab's very lips turned white as she heard this speech.

"Robert," she said, "what can you do that the world should turn against you? What can you do?"

Robert reddened, and rose, as he answered—

"I told you I could not tell you, and you see that I have said too much—since I have roused a sort of mistrust in you. But you will do me justice to-morrow, Mab."

"Dear Robert, I do you justice now, and I have faith in you, and I will be patient—indeed, I will; but if you love us, oh! Robert! do not get into danger of any sort—do not, Robert."

She took his hand in the ardour of her entreaty. He smiled, and spoke cheerfully; but though Mab did not repeat their conversation to Miss Lavinia, that lady's worst fears were confirmed, for Robert left the house without taking any breakfast. He went at once to Mr. Long's. He found that gentleman in his attic, still in bed, and very low-spirited.

"My dear Ford," he said, "I have not slept a wink all night for thinking of you. Allow me to remonstrate once more. I am sure that when you have heard me out you will assuredly give up this dangerous enterprise."

"My dear fellow," replied Robert, leaning back in his chair with a quiet smile, "I did not sleep last night for thinking of this dangerous enterprise,

as you call it. I weighed every chance for and against it, and I came to the conclusion that I cannot recede from it without shame and dishonour. It may be that the means I take are objectionable, or rather incomplete; but I do what I can—not what I should wish to do. I do not restore to Miss Winter her name and position, but I give her back what is left of her wealth. That man gets off more cheaply than he deserves in keeping what shreds of reputation he still possesses. Let him do his worst against me—I do not, I will not fear him. I tell you I am prepared for the worst—for a policeman in the next room, and a charge of extortion. I am prepared for it, without apprehending it; he is too guilty to venture on so desperate a remedy; and now that I have set the matter right, allow me to ask if those papers are ready?”

“My dear fellow,” compassionately said Mr. Long, “here are your papers, but don’t thank me. I have been putting a rope round your neck. Moreover, do not suppose they will answer your purpose—they are only opening trifles—you don’t know the law. The law of this country is very strict with voluntary deeds. It does not like them; it never helps them—it regards them with great suspicion.”

“Does it cancel them?” asked Robert.

"When it is proved that they are obtained by undue influence, certainly."

Robert winced.

"Is it possible?" he said, impatiently, "that so simple a matter——"

"Simple!" interrupted Mr. Long, "there is nothing simple when you have to deal with an unwilling or a dishonest man."

"Why, no," answered Robert, struck with the remark, "you are right enough there. Nevertheless, I must go on with what I have begun, and see if I cannot keep that man to his word. It is seven now, I told him eight—shall I sit with you till the time comes?"

"Do, and I shall accompany you—not to the house—but having, however unwillingly, participated in the matter thus far, I am curious to see the end of it."

Robert laughed; it was plain Mr. Long expected to see him come out of Mr. George's abode in a cab, escorted by two police officers.

"I think we can go now," he said, as half-past seven struck.

"Very well," replied Mr. Long, "very well."

They walked out slowly, arm in arm. The morning was warm and still—the streets were already crowded. The throng lessened as they reached that part of the city in which Mr. George lived.

"I think you had better drop my arm," said Robert to his friend. "We might meet some one, Mr. George himself, and it is best I should not be accompanied."

"Ford!" impressively said Mr. Long, "it is time yet—think over it—it is time yet."

"It is a quarter to eight," answered Robert; and, dropping Mr. Long's arm, he walked on.

"There is a fire somewhere," said Mr. Long, as a strong smell of burning suddenly filled the street along which they were walking.

Even as he spoke, a huge cloud of smoke spread across the sky. They quickened their step. The cloud increased; the sky was blackened over their heads. They heard shouts, too, and tumultuous exclamations. As they turned the corner, the dismal scene came full in view. Surrounded by a vast crowd, stood a burning house; it faced an old church, of which the window-panes glittered again with the reflection of the flames, and Robert knew it well. Two engines were in full play, and had been so for hours, the young men heard, not to save that house—it was doomed—but those next it and the buildings opposite.

"I know nothing so grand as a fire!" enthusiastically exclaimed Mr. Long; "and there is no place like London for fires, unless it be Constantinople, I believe. I hope there is no one in that

house, though!" he added, addressing his neighbour, a working man with his bag of tools on his shoulder.

"No one, sir. All gone hours ago."

Even as he spoke, there rose a great cry, followed by a sudden silence. The flames had not yet reached the upper windows. One of these suddenly opened, and a man's face and figure appeared in the lurid glare. A hundred voices shouted "The fire-escape!—the fire-escape!" but before the words had died away—before the wretched man's waving arms had finished a frantic gesture for help—he had vanished; the floor beneath him had given way, and he had sunk down into the fiery gulph below.

A deep awe-struck stillness followed the tragic incident. After this the rest was nothing—a tame battle between fire and water. Ere long the flames were conquered: liquid torrents beat them back whenever their forked heads appeared. The roof sank in with a crash, and there remained a gaunt spectre-like mass, on which the water still poured with steady force.

"Very shocking!" said Mr. Long, with a slight shiver, and he looked at Robert Ford.

The young man had neither moved nor spoken since they had come within sight of the fire. He now stood still like one rooted to the stones, but

his face was so dreadfully pale, and so extraordinary a change had come over it, that his friend was startled. He shook his arm.

"Rouse yourself," he said, "it is dreadful of course, but how many yearly die by fire in London alone! I have a great aversion to that sort of death, of course; but still what can we do?"

Robert did rouse himself, but with a strong effort.

"I think I shall go home," he said, slowly.

"Home!" echoed Samuel Long, "and your appointment? It is just striking eight."

And so it was. The old church-clock in its brick turret was slowly telling the hour of Robert's appointment with Mr. George. Strange thoughts came into Robert's mind as he heard it. He remembered Mr. George's remark, not much more than a week back:

"What do you suppose is the result of living opposite a church? Why, that one's watch is sure to be always wrong," and every stroke of the clock sounded like a knell.

"I think I shall go home," he said again; and, as Mr. Long looked at him with amazement, he added: "That house was his house."

Mr. Long looked at him.

"Did you know that man?" he asked.

"It was he."

When the blackened ruins were searched the next day, two charred corpses were found in them. One, a man's, still clasped, with useless force, a small fireproof safe, in which some important papers were found; the other, a woman's, lay not far from what had been Mr. George's room. Both could have been saved. He went back to secure bonds, worse to him than Shylock's—she remained, not to leave him. Thus both perished in the catastrophe—thus one fate ushered them both to the next world, and the solemn Judgment of God.

CHAPTER XXI.

THEY had not walked far, when Robert, turning round, said to his friend,

“Long, do not take it amiss if I ask you to leave me.”

“No—of course not—of course not,” soothingly replied Mr. Long; “of course you must feel this very much, and yet, my dear fellow, dreadful as this event is in other respects, you are lucky, positively lucky, that it ends thus for you;” and, cordially pressing Robert’s hand, he left him.

Robert Ford walked on. He felt dull, inert, plunged in a painful stupor, from which his will could not rouse him. He did not go home. He wandered about the whole day in Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens. Never had he known such a day—never did he forget it. Towards dusk he went home. As he passed by the parlour windows

of the house in Queen Square, he heard the voices within, and his father's among the rest.

"So, he has come back," vaguely thought Robert ; "then he, too, has failed."

There were no lights in the parlour when Robert entered it. He was glad of it, they could not see his face.

"My dear Robert, have you had any dinner?" eagerly asked Miss Lavinia.

"Thank you, aunt, I want none," he replied ; and he sat down on an end of the sofa.

A deep silence followed ; his voice sounded hollow and strange, but no one questioned him.

"Are you going to get lights?" crossly asked Mr. Ford, and he began walking up and down the room with his hands in his pockets.

"He has failed ; it is all over!" thought Robert. There was no reason why he should keep his gloomy tidings to himself, and the sooner the bitter task of telling them was over, the better. "A great calamity has occurred," he said, slowly. There was a breathless silence, even Mr. Ford stopped short. Robert continued : "Mr. George's house in the City is burned down, and Mr. George has perished in it."

The door opened, and Lucy came in bearing the lights. Mab, Miss Lavinia, who sat near the window, were very pale ; the two young men, near

them, were deeply disturbed; but Mr. Ford, standing in the centre of the room, looked the picture of grief and despair.

"And who is Mr. George's heir?" he asked in a voice full of woe.

"Captain George, of course," replied Robert.

Mr. Ford groaned aloud.

"It is the curse of God!" he said; "it is the curse of God!"

None present understood the words, save his eldest son. Ay, it was the curse of God indeed, for Mr. Ford had failed; Mab was not righted yet—and the wealth which Mr. George had carefully hoarded for years, Captain George would quickly spend.

"Fifteen thousand pounds lying by ten years," said Mr. Ford; "fifteen thousand pounds!"

"My dear John," faltered Miss Lavinia, "what is it?—what ails you?"

"I tell you it is fifteen thousand," said Mr. Ford, with a sort of cry. "Fifteen thousand pounds lying by for ten years."

Robert rose, and, taking his father's arm, led him into the garden.

"For God's sake, be calm!" he entreated, himself much agitated.

"Robert, it is the curse of God!" pitifully said his father; "it is the curse of God that is on me, my boy!"

But Robert still entreated and argued. Mr. Ford heard him with a sort of sullen resignation, then, stung with shame, he rose abruptly and left the house. The young man went back to the parlour. No allusion was made to Mr. Ford's strange conduct, and Robert did his best to make it be forgotten, by relating the accident in full.

"How dreadful!" said Miss Lavinia.

"It is a great calamity," said Robert; "and we are sufferers, too. I lose my situation, of course, and William and Edward lose the chance I have been so long seeking for them."

"How so?" eagerly asked William; "the situations were promised."

"My dear boy," interrupted Robert, "I have strong reasons to believe that Mr. George deceived me in that matter; at the same time, I would in some manner or other have made him keep his promise; but his death puts an end to all such projects. As you are, you must remain, and I am utterly cast adrift."

Miss Lavinia could not bear the deep despondency of Robert's voice, she burst into tears, and left the room. William whistled, and looked steadily out of the window, whilst Edward kicked the floor with his foot. Mab went and sat on the sofa by Robert.

"Dear Robert," she whispered, passing her arm

within his and looking up in his face, "you will do well yet."

"I hope so," he replied, calmly; "will you get me a cup of tea, Mab?"

She rang the bell, and made the tea; neither Mr. Ford nor his sister appeared to partake of the meal. It was silent and cheerless. When it was over, William and Edward went out, and Mab remained alone with Robert. Again she attempted consolation; but she did not know how deep the wound lay, nor how great a share she had in its bitterness; Robert heard her out, then said with an impatient sigh:

"Mab, it is no use talking so. I told you this morning that this day was a momentous one for us both, and I will not hide from you that it has ended in the deepest ruin. Do not question me, do not ask to know more. I cannot speak. The secret is no longer mine; death has its share in it; but believe me when I say that my case is hopeless. You see these papers," he added, drawing forth from his breast pocket a packet of blue foolscap, tied with red tape, "well, Mab, this morning they were wealth and a competency, and, if you want to know what they are this evening, look at them."

He lit them at the flame of the candle as he spoke, and, throwing them on the hearth, saw them burn and shrivel there with the gloomiest mien Mab had ever seen him wear.

"Robert, you have no confidence in me," she very sadly said.

"I tell you, Mab, the secret is not mine," he replied, rather sharply; "and, indeed, I should never have told you so much as I did tell you this morning."

"Robert, you told me nothing," replied Mab, much hurt; "you have lived in mysteries for the last week,"

There was a long pause. At length Robert spoke.

"Mab," he said, in a voice that faltered slightly, "you must have faith in me, you must believe that I love you."

"I do believe it, Robert, I do—but why do you speak so?"

"Because I am going to put your affection, and your faith in mine, to the proof. I am going to leave you, Mab—I am determined on going to Australia. Do not look at me so. There is nothing to be done here—here a man of pride cannot live."

"But why should one have pride, Robert?"

"Oh! Mab, do not talk so."

"I will. Why must we all be so anxious to be rich?—Robert, I am not ambitious."

"I am, Mab—I am ambitious for you," replied Robert, looking down at her with fondness and pride. "I will not marry you to make of you a

servant of all work. And, even admitting I should get another situation, how are we to live and marry on a hundred or a hundred and fifty pounds a year?"

This was a question Mab did not exactly care to answer. She was in no hurry to marry, in no hurry to be tied, and the vision of the hundred pounds a year income was not a tempting one.

"But why go so far?" she urged.

"Because here there is nothing to be done."

Still Mab objected, but to every objection Robert had a sufficient answer. Despair had taken possession of the young man's heart. He had built on Mab for a fortune, and now that this hope was wrecked, that Mr. George's fears were beyond the reach of his menaces, he felt hopeless and powerless. The thought, too, that the spendthrift Captain George would soon revel in the wealth out of which Robert had hoped to carve for himself, Mab, and his brothers, a handsome competency, was poison to his soul. He felt it was a sight he could not look on, and though she little suspected his motives, Mab felt that Robert's resolve was beyond the reach of her influence. Her tears and her prayers alike remained powerless.

"Oh! Robert!" she said at length, "you do not love me."

"It is because I love you that I go, Mab."

The next morning at breakfast, Robert announced his resolve to the family. Miss Lavinia burst into tears, and with broken sobs exclaimed :

“My dear—Robert—may God bless you—wherever you go.”

William and Edward looked excited and approving, but Mr. Ford turned very pale, and said, pathetically :

“No, Bob, no, my boy—you cannot go and leave your old father—no, you can’t do it.”

Such language was very rare from Mr. Ford. Robert was affected, but though Mab looked at him appealingly, his purpose was not shaken.

“I must go,” he said; “I cannot stay here to sink down into a clerk, and there is no other prospect before me. I have not been brought up to a profession, and moreover it will be no particular recommendation for me to have been reared in Mr. George’s office.”

Mr. Ford felt the reproach, and his nether lip quivered, but he said nothing.

“Moreover,” continued Robert, “what are the prospects of my younger brothers? By emigrating I pave them the way; and, as I hope and trust, open to them a better and more prosperous career than they could ever hope for in England.”

So that was it. Robert did not merely mean to go, he also meant to rob him of his two younger

sons. Mr. Ford looked at them. There was no mistaking their eager, hopeful faces. Of course emigration was the thing, and William promptly said so.

"I think Robert's scheme an admirable one," he remarked; "of course he can get a situation at once through Mr. Norton; and when he has got one, he can write over for us, and we shall get situations, too. Everyone says there is no country like Australia for energy and enterprise: America is used up, but Australia is the very thing."

"There is no doubt about it," sententiously said Edward; "England has long been exhausted, unless for capital, but in Australia man is capital, you see."

Mr. Ford rose and left the room. Mab followed him out.

"Uncle, dear uncle," she whispered, following him up the staircase, "bear it better."

Mr. Ford only shook his white hair, without answering her. Still she followed him until they entered the back drawing-room together. Then Mr. Ford threw himself in his chair, and looked piteously at her.

"They will break my heart," he said, "they will break my heart. Oh! Mab, I have deserved it all—but still they should not leave me—they should

not leave their old father to die alone ! Oh ! it is hard, Mab, that he will take away my boys, and that I am nothing in my own house—and no one to my own children !”

Mab felt it was very hard. Her own heart, too, was very sore. She sat on Mr. Ford’s knee, she twined her arms around Mr. Ford’s neck, and giving him a passionate caress, she exclaimed, in the fulness of her heart :

“Let them go, uncle—nothing shall ever divide us—nothing—we shall live and die together, come what will !”

“Yes, Mab,” said Mr. Ford, returning her embrace, “come what will.”

CHAPTER XXII.

NOTHING occurred to shake Robert's resolve. Mr. Ford raised no further opposition to it ; and obstacles, few though they were, yielded before Robert's will. The first overcome was that of money. Robert had a small sum by him, but the late Mr. George owed him upwards of fifty pounds ; and as the young man was fortunately able to prove his debt, he lost no time in claiming the amount from Mr. George's lucky heir, Captain George. His written application was promptly attended to, and the Captain, with his compliments, politely requested Mr. Robert Ford to call on him in his new apartments, at the west end of the town, next Tuesday, at two of the afternoon. Robert Ford was punctual to the minute—partly because it was his temper to be so, partly because he wished the hateful business over. He found Captain George

smoking at the open window of a handsome drawing-room, and looking, as well he might, in high good-humour. Mrs. George he did not see. Her boudoir was evidently no longer identical with Captain George's sitting-room. Nothing could exceed Captain George's affable reception of Robert.

"Very happy to see you," he said, gracefully pointing to a chair; "pray take a seat, Mr. — Ford, ah! yes, Robert Ford, I remember. And so," continued Captain George, throwing his cigar out of the window with cool disregard of the passengers in the street; "and so, Mr. Ford, you want to speak to me. Now, it may spare you some trouble if I tell you plainly that Captain George and Mr. James George always were two very different persons, and are not to be acted upon by the same means—not at all. Perhaps you are not aware, my dear young gentleman, that I am thoroughly well acquainted with the nature of the last conversations that passed between you and my lamented brother—but I am. He reposed that much confidence in me that he repeated to me every word of your kind and well-meant proposals. Now, allow me to tell you, that though you would never have got a farthing of ready money out of him—James would have died first, poor fellow—it is very likely that you would have done him, or rather have done me out of the very handsome in-

heritance I have just stepped into. I tell you this, to heighten your natural regret for the loss you have sustained in my dear brother, and also as a little memorial of the conversation which passed between us not two weeks ago. You see, my good young man, what your chance is with me, a very small one. You may tell the whole world, if you like, that I once resided at Westdean Lodge—I shall not deny it; I have no doubt Westdean Lodge was a very pretty place. You may also add, if it should please you to do so, that Widow Lawrence was my housekeeper; thank Heaven, my character is above suspicion, and Mrs. George is above jealousy. In short, you may do exactly what you please,” added Captain George, in the same tone of agreeable banter; “and now that you know a bit of my mind, will you be so good as to tell me your object in seeking for this interview?”

Robert had not sat down, and though boiling with rage at Captain George’s taunts, he looked down at him very calmly, and said in tones of ice: “I called, sir, to request you to settle a bill owing to me by your late brother, and I distinctly mentioned the matter in my note, requesting you at the same time to authorize your solicitors.”

“I have none,” interrupted Captain George. “Ever since Ribs—of course you know Ribs—

ever since Ribs attempted to charge me for a conversation held during the dinner to which I had invited him—and such a dinner, the ungrateful vagabond!—ever since then, I say, I have been my own solicitor. Not that I paid him—‘No, no, Ribs,’ I said, ‘that will never do—never.’ But with regard to that matter of yours, Mr. Robert Ford, it is very unlucky that my brother’s books are burned—awkward, eh?”

“Not for me,” drily replied Robert. “The amount due to me is fifty-two pounds, seven shillings, and sixpence, and I am ready to prove my debt this moment.”

“No need—no need,” gracefully replied Captain George, “fifty-two pounds seven shillings and sixpence—make it a round number, say fifty-three pounds;” and Captain George, who was his own banker, as well as his own legal adviser, thrust his hand into his pocket and brought out from its depths five ten-pound notes and three sovereigns, which he tossed on the table with a careless and generous “there!” Robert took up the money, counted it, then drew out his purse, counted out twelve shillings and sixpence on the table, and putting by them a stamped receipt for the amount paid to him, he left the room without honouring Captain George with either a word or a look.

Thus ended, and for ever, his fatal connexion

with Mab's wrongers, and if anything could have strengthened his wish to leave England, Captain George's galling taunts would have done it.

Far too quickly, to Miss Lavinia's sorrow, passed the days that were to end in Robert's departure. The weather was fine and propitious. Never had a brighter sun shone in clearer skies. This fine weather continued until the evening of the day on which Robert was to sail. On that evening Robert and Mab, sitting on the bench between the two poplar trees in the garden, spoke together for the last time. Robert had wisely refused to let Mab, Miss Ford, and even his brothers, see him on board the next morning. He was to part from them in Queen Square, and his father alone was to accompany him to Gravesend. This therefore was his real adieu to Mab; the family knew it, and no one intruded on their privacy.

Daylight was fading. Mab looked at the sky, of a pale blue towards the zenith, red and glowing in the west. She watched the rising of a bright, liquid star, that seemed to be both ascending and slowly coming forth from the depths of heaven, then suddenly laying her head on Robert's shoulder, she began to cry. He stooped and pressed his lips to her cheek.

"Dear Mab," he said, "if we loved each other less, we should feel it less. It is very hard. Where

is our villa on the Thames, with the roses and the swans? Have they villas in Australia, and shall we get one, or rough it in the bush? God knows. I am hopeful, but not sanguine. I shall work hard, send for the boys, and then, when there is a fit home for you, I shall come and fetch you."

"Robert," despondently said Mab, "your departure makes me very unhappy. I almost feel as if I were the cause of your going. Oh! Robert, it is very hard for me to think that if you were not engaged to me, you would not leave home, and aunt, whom it cuts up so much—and uncle, who will not show his grief, though it is the deepest of all. Robert," she added, gathering courage, "it is not too late yet—remain—and let us not marry."

Robert seemed very much hurt to find that Mab could take so philosophic a view of their future fate, and he said with some bitterness:

"Mab, how can you be so cold?"

"I am not cold," replied Mab, very sadly, "but I am poor and proud; and, believe me, Robert, it is a hard trial for a girl to feel that she can be nothing but a burden to the man who marries her."

"Then, Madam Mab, or Queen Mab, you will please to discard all such fancies. Poor and burdensome as you are, I mean to have you, and to let no one else have a chance of you."

Mab blushed a little, but she was pleased, as Robert meant that she should be ; for, though she was too proud to show it, she always had an uneasy consciousness that, in his heart, Robert did not care so very much about her.

"No, no," said Robert, smoothing her hair, "no talk of non-engagement, please. I do not release you, and do not want to be released either. We are bound, and, thank heaven, it is for life. We will find another Thames, and scarlet geraniums instead of roses, though I dare say there are roses in Australia, and we shall have a sweet and happy home in a few years, Mab."

"Be it so," she replied, and, giving him her hand, she added frankly, "it is for life, Robert."

Early the next morning Robert and Mr. Ford left. The parting was brief, but bitter. Mab almost forgot her own grief in the task of comforting Miss Ford. When the door closed on her darling, and the cab drove away, Miss Lavinia burst into sobs and tears, restrained till then, and exclaimed :

"Mab, I shall never see him again—never, Mab—never !"

Mr. Ford came back in the afternoon. He looked very pale and worn, but spoke little. To Miss Lavinia's fond and eager questions, he gave but brief replies.

"He's gone," he said, mechanically ; "I told you so, Livy ; he's gone. I never saw him look so like his mother—never."

"And—and what did he say?" sobbed Miss Ford.

"He sent his love to Mab, and you and the boys—but don't tease me, Livy, I cannot bear it. I cannot."

Mab went up to him and laid her cheek to his.

"Uncle," she whispered, "I am really and truly to become Robert's wife——"

"Then why did he not stay and marry you?" interrupted Mr. Ford. "I wanted him to do so, but no, he would run away."

"Uncle, he is too poor to marry now, but he must get on, he is so clever, and, as I said, I am to be his wife, and you shall never leave us—never—and he will send for the boys, and come and fetch us, and we will have a new life and a new home."

But Mr. Ford shook his head and sighed.

"He is gone, Mab," he said, "gone for ever ; and I asked him to stay and marry you, and he would not ;" and Mab, too, sighed, for her heart was sore.

PART THE THIRD.

MAB'S FAITH.

CHAPTER I.

WE will let three years slip by.

Mab is sitting on the bench in the garden, reading a letter from William, for the two boys long ago joined their elder brother. The letter is bright and hopeful, but Mab's face is clouded. Why did not Robert write? He had no time. He should have had time. Then comes another question: Why did Robert emigrate?" He is a clerk at Mr. Norton's—could he not have been a clerk in England? Has going so far brought them any the nearer to the goal of their mutual wishes? To all seeming it has not; and, therefore, Mab is grave now; the house is so altered: Mr. Ford and his sister were never very cheerful company, Susan has retired on a pension, even Fancy sleeps in her grave at the root of the poplar tree—nothing is as it used to be.

"Mab," said Mr. Ford, coming up to her with a letter in his hand, "would you like to travel?"

"Like it!" cried Mab, with sparkling eyes.

"Well, then, get ready: the Irish Fords have asked Livy and you to spend the summer with them."

"And you, uncle?"

"I have another journey to take. You must go without me."

"And Captain George has been this morning," thought Mab; "it is always when Captain George comes that uncle travels." Her curiosity was roused, and she could not help saying aloud:

"Uncle, is it true that Captain George is so very poor?"

"What!" asked Mr. Ford, much startled, "poor! did you say poor, Mab?"

"Ye-es," she replied, slowly; "is he poor?"

"Have you been giving him money, Mab?—have you been giving him money?"

"Only half-a-crown—and he looks so wretched, uncle."

Mr. Ford stamped his foot, and clenched his fist.

"The vagabond!" he muttered; "she has been giving him money, she has!"

"I know he is, or was, extravagant," pleaded Mab, "or he could not have run through his brother's money."

"It was not his," said Mr. Ford, angrily; "it was not. He was a thief—they were thieves—and never give Captain George a shilling, Mab, if you do not want to break my heart."

"But, uncle—why do you see him?"

Mr. Ford's face became vacant and dull.

"He is useful to me," he said, slowly; "and I pay him for it—but never give him a shilling, Mab, never. And now, child, do get ready for that journey—do; and go and tell your aunt."

Mab nodded, and at once went up to Miss Lavinia with the tidings.

"I can't go, Mab," said Miss Ford, sitting down, "I can't."

"Why not, aunt?"

"I have taken a horror of railway travelling ever since Mrs. Norton told me that dreadful story about the milkmen."

"The milkmen, aunt?"

"Yes, milkmen, who had been out for a day's shooting, and they had a bag full of rabbits, and were travelling with Mrs. Norton in the same carriage actually. Well, they got playful, as she called it, and they took the dead rabbits out of the bag, and began throwing them at each other, and across Mrs. Norton, until one of them actually hit her! Mab, I can't go."

"Oh! aunt, you don't believe that—do you?"

"My dear, I saw it in the police reports. Besides, we cannot leave the house alone if your uncle is going. Who will take care of it?"

"Providence and Lucy, aunt. At all events, I shall pack up—do not mind about your trunk, aunt."

But Miss Ford would mind; she would take her own time, too. Yet even her slowness could create no further delay, and on a fine July morning the cab was at the door, the trunks were securely strapped on the roof, and the two ladies had only to step in, and drive off to the station.

"Go and enjoy yourself, my darling," said Mr. Ford, who seemed rather excited; "that is better than growing pale over those books of yours, or playing half the night on your harmonium. You have not led a wholesome life of late, Mab; and if Robert was so fond of you as he said, he would never have left you, nor yet taken away the poor boys. They are gone now—all gone!"

"Don't, uncle," entreated Mab.

"You will like the Irish Fords," he resumed, changing the subject; "but where is Livy? Livy, you will be late."

"I can't help it," desperately replied Miss Ford, appearing at the head of the kitchen staircase, in a state of nervous excitement, "there are thieves in this house. I have lost my purse. I had it this

morning, and it is gone now; and some one must have taken it."

She entered the parlour, and sat down as she spoke.

"Aunt, we shall be late," said Mab.

"I can't help it," despondently replied Miss Lavinia; "we cannot go. We cannot travel without money, and all my money was in my purse. Get it from the thief—what have I to do with it!"

She looked helpless and desolate.

"Aunt," resolutely said Mab, "you must have the purse; try in your pocket."

But Miss Lavinia shook her head. She was sure the purse was not there.

"Think where you have put it, aunt," persisted Mab, who knew some of her aunt's ways; "try and remember now—was it in the tea-pot, in a stocking, or up the chimney?"

"I—I think it was in a stocking," replied Miss Ford, bewildered at this new view of the question.

"In *a* stocking," said poor Mab, uttering the indefinite article with something like despair, "then we must unpack the trunk," she resignedly added.

Miss Lavinia's trunk was accordingly taken down from the roof of the cab, opened, and unpacked in the hall; and, in a deceitful looking stocking, as neatly folded as if it were innocent of all mischief, the missing purse was found.

“And now you may be off,” said Mr. Ford, giving the purse into Mab’s keeping, adding emphatically, as he did so, “don’t let her have it again, Mab, or she will do something else with it.”

Then came the final parting—the embraces—the last recommendations, and the cab drove away, and they were gone. Journeys have now kept but one romance, that of speed. The enchantment of old Arab tales and wild northern legends is fulfilled for us. The wonderful carpet, which bore princes through the air—the magic horse, who flew through space—have found their rival in the long black line of railway-carriages, that glance with the speed of lightning through the green landscape.

Rapid, safe, and easy was Mab’s journey. England was crossed; the airy mountains of Wales were passed and left behind; Ireland was reached and traversed; and on a wild grey afternoon Mab and Miss Lavinia, after resting a while at a small town on their way, secured a conveyance that was to take them to O’Lally’s Town, still a few miles distant. Miss Lavinia’s restlessness woke anew. She looked as frightened and uncomfortable as Mab looked gay and secure. The journey, fatiguing though rapid, had not told on her; the light spirit of youth had borne her through it, happy and hopeful, as when she and Miss Lavinia left Queen Square.

The scenery through which they passed to go to O'Lally's Town, had the wildness and romance that charm the heart of youth. On one side roared the heavy green waves of the Atlantic; on the other, mountains, silent and stern, rose on a cloudy sky. Now and then steep gaps disclosed valleys of the purest green, with the smoke of a hidden waterfall rising above them, or a herd of cattle browsing on the edge of a rugged precipice; cabins there were few, or none—man had either forsaken or been driven from this wild region.

"I wish we had dear Robert with us!" said Miss Lavinia.

"Aunt," said Mab, after a pause, "you will not forget your promise."

"What promise, my dear?"

"Not to mention my engagement to Robert."

Miss Ford seemed to hesitate.

"Indeed, aunt, you must not mention it," warmly insisted Mab. "Robert has been gone three years, and may not come back for ten. I will not look forsaken or neglected by Robert."

"Very well, my dear—indeed you are quite right. I shall not mention it. Why, this must be the place!"

Day was fading into twilight. After passing through a line of cottages they came up to a large square house, which had quite lost its barn-like look, and which had two lawns in front and a grove

of young trees behind. As the carriage drove up to the house, the door opened and two middle-aged ladies came out, beaming with hospitality. Warm and cordial was their greeting to their guests.

"We did not expect you till to-morrow," said Miss Emily, taking the lead, as usual; "are you tired, Lavinia?"

"No—thank you," hesitatingly answered Miss Ford, conscientiously revolving in her mind how far she was tired or not.

"And you are not tired, I am sure," gaily said Miss Ellen to Mab; "you look too blooming for fatigue."

Her look expressed the admiration youth in its bloom is sure to win; and Mab smiled, and said, very sweetly, that she was not fatigued. They entered the house, and were shown into the sitting-room, where we saw Miss Emily and Miss Ellen three years ago. It was amply furnished now, but it looked almost dark, spite the glow of two lamps. The wainscotted walls, the leather-covered chairs and sofas, absorbed light and gave back gloom. Formal dignity and no grace characterized this apartment.

"Perhaps you would like to unwrap in here," said Miss Emily, leading them through this room to another much smaller next it.

Miss Lavinia sat down, unfolded a shawl, un-

pinned a cloak, and unfastened another shawl. Before she had half done Mab's bonnet and traveling cloak were neatly put aside, and she stood before the sisters in her close-fitting black silk and dainty white collar, her golden hair braided back, her clear red and white complexion blooming as health and air could make it, and her soft grey eyes beaming with gentle excitement and good humour. Mab was too attractive and lady-like not to strike the sisters. The simplicity and precision of her attire, the ease of her manners, and the girlish grace of her person, impressed them favourably; yet Mab thought, and she was not mistaken, that uneasiness blended with their evident liking and admiration. They exchanged looks, which meant as plainly as shrewd little Mab could read, "Our brother!"

But "our brother" was in no immediate danger; he was away on business, and was not expected till the next day. Still Mab was confirmed in a suspicion she had already felt; it was Mr. Ford who had asked for, not the Miss Fords who had offered the invitation.

"What a pity there is not a bridge across that nice little river," said Miss Ford, pausing in the unwrapping. "We might have been here much earlier if there had been one."

"A bridge across Shane's river!" exclaimed the

two sisters; "you will never see that, Lavinia. Mr. Briggs wanted to have one, but our brother would not allow it."

"I suppose the engineers could not manage it," said Miss Lavinia, looking wise.

The twin sisters knew nothing about that, but their brother would not have a bridge, and so there was an end of it. Miss Lavinia's looks expressed her astonishment.

"And does he then do all that he pleases?" she could not help saying.

It was the turn of the sisters to look surprised.

"Of course he does," replied Miss Ellen, with strong emphasis. "Nothing of a public character is done for miles around without his knowledge or consent. It was he who got the railway branch, in spite of every opposition. But when Mr. Briggs wanted to have the bridge by the sly, our dear brother soon put an end to the matter."

"It is very kind of him to take so much trouble in public business," gravely said Mab; "but how does he find time for it all?"

Miss Emily gave her a searching look; but Miss Ellen, unconscious of lurking irony, replied in her earnest way:

"Our dear brother finds time for everything. It is wonderful even to us. We do not know how he manages it all. Why, to this day we cannot

guess how he found out about that bridge, and how he defeated Mr. Briggs—but he did it in twenty-four hours. Some men are born to command, I suppose,” she added.

“A formidable power!” said Mab, “and one that must give him his share of enemies.”

The two sisters exchanged amazed looks.

“Enemies!” cried Miss Ellen, “why, he is adored. There is not a more popular man in the whole country. As to the servants, I do not exaggerate when I say that they love his little finger better than our whole bodies, and would die for him if need were.”

“I am sure they would,” said Miss Emily, with perfect composure; “and what is more, I never yet knew man or woman who approached him and could either resist or dislike him. Why, Mr. Briggs himself loves him dearly.”

A pretty smile curled Mab’s rosy lips, and Miss Lavinia, feeling at a loss what to say, uttered a vague and comprehensive “Indeed!”

Miss Ellen, who had slipped out of the room, now put in her good-tempered face at the door, and uttered the welcome intimation that dinner was waiting.

Miss Emily rose and showed her guests into the dining-room. She took the head of the table, and said grace, and the meal, a very plain one, began.

Everything, indeed, seemed plain to Mab. The Miss Fords were hospitable and kind, but she was disappointed in them. She found them tame and prosy, and missed the flow of wit and eloquence which she had been prepared to meet in Ireland. Instead of these, she got some statements and opinions that surprised her.

“What a fine view of the sea you must have from that window,” remarked Mab, glancing at a large bay window opposite her.

“Oh! no, thank Heaven,” emphatically said Miss Emily, shuddering slightly as she spoke.

Mab was too well bred to inquire into the reason of so singular a feeling, but Miss Emily gave it freely.

“We were nearly wrecked when we were girls, Ellen and I, and for years we lived inland, and could not bear to look at water. Our brother has planted trees wherever there is a glimpse of the sea, and though we cannot help hearing it and knowing it is there, we manage never to see it.”

Mab supposed they preferred pastoral landscapes; but neither of the sisters expressed any sympathy; the country for them, as Mab indignantly concluded, was fresh air and a farm-yard.

They liked O’Lally’s Town, however, and liked both the estate and the name it bore. This led Mab to inquire, in her innocence, if the Irish

O'Lallys were related to the French family of Lally Tolendal.

"The French Lally Tolendal family," drily said Miss Emily, "claims to be descended from the Dermot O'Maollalee, whose name has been unfortunately corrupted into O'Lally; but the fact is doubtful; I do not think they have been formally acknowledged. Ellen, my dear, may I trouble you for that fish?—Miss Ford, I insist on your taking more. With regard to those French Lallys, Miss Winter, they are another proof of the different fortunes which await the native Irish at home and abroad. My brother, Mr. O'Lally, lives by his own exertions—a commercial man. Of the vast lands of his ancestors he has not an acre; his birth procures him no distinction, insures him no privilege. The Lally Tolendals of France, on the contrary, from mere soldiers of fortune, rise to the highest distinction."

"One had his head cut off," demurely said Mab.

"Yes, my dear, he had," said Miss Emily, apparently unconscious of satire; "he was beheaded like a gentleman; in his own country he would have been hanged like a felon."

Mab felt answered, and began to think that Miss Emily, at least, was not exactly so tame as she had fancied.

But there was something in Miss Emily's

answer which jarred with Mab's pride. She was no one, worse than no one—a foundling. How they must despise her!

“With regard to our brother—” resumed Miss Emily. She did not proceed; the door had opened, Mr. O’Lally himself stood before them.

CHAPTER II.

MAB saw a pale and slight young man, with a massive forehead, dark hair, deep blue eyes, and fine aquiline features. He had the olive complexion and the look of a southern, and his face, though by no means a common one, at once struck Mab as one with which she had long been familiar. Of all this she was conscious in a glance, for, on perceiving their brother, the two sisters had risen with evident joy, and, scarcely summoning presence of mind to perform the ceremony of introduction, they welcomed him with an ardour that surprised Mab, after what proved to be only a week's absence.

"My dear brother! why did you not come half-an-hour earlier?" tenderly said Ellen; and Mab detected, and thought she could read the look with which Mr. O'Lally's sister scanned the dishes on

the table. "We have had your favourite fish, too," she added, and she sighed, perhaps because the choicest morsels were gone.

Mab was not mistaken. Miss Ellen did grudge every dainty of which her darling brother had not partaken, and Miss Emily was not behind her in the feeling. Mr. O'Lally was the centre of creation in their eyes, and if they were gentle and generous in all else, they were certainly as hard and as selfish for him as their kind natures allowed them to be. The love which was their cardinal virtue was also their weakness. It began with his name of O'Lally, of which they were far prouder than if they had shared it, and it ended with the minutest of his personal comforts. Yet to all appearance this domestic idolatry had not spoiled Mr. O'Lally. Mab, a keen and amused observer, watched in vain for the irrepressible pettishness of an indulged man. Mr. O'Lally was polite to her, cordial to her aunt, kind to his sisters, and, what pleased her best, he sat down and ate his dinner without either affected indifference or interest. At the same time, Mab had full opportunity of seeing that the sisters had not deceived her. Mr. O'Lally's power over all who approached him was absolute. He had no need to ask for any thing; he only looked at the servants and they ran and obeyed that silent glance. His sisters themselves

did not give him time to express a wish, they eagerly forestalled his every desire; and Mr. O'Lally, though essentially courteous and kind, took all this with the matter of course way of a man who was accustomed to it. But though there was some severity in the fine classical lines of his face, there was no imperiousness; his look was calm, his smile, though rare, remarkably beautiful, his voice was genial and good-humoured; strong indomitable will might be the source of his power in his little world, but it assuredly was a will which knew how to clothe itself in gentleness.

"He fascinates them first," thought Mab, "then he rules them. They all, Mr. Briggs included, I suppose, fear, love, and obey him." These thoughts passed through her mind whilst Mr. O'Lally asked Miss Lavinia how long she had been in Ireland. Miss Lavinia took time to consider the question. Mr. O'Lally relieved her from her perplexity by saying:

"I forgot that you had come straight on from Dublin. You had a long drive along Shane's river."

"It was very wild and lovely," replied Miss Lavinia, anxious to praise something.

"Too wild a great deal," he said, drily. "We pay the cost of that wild landscape. However, if you should favour us with another visit, you will

have a shorter drive to O'Lally's Town: for then a stone bridge shall span Shane's river."

"You have decided upon one, then," said Miss Emily.

"Yes. It is to be near the rock, exactly in a straight line between the station and O'Lally's Town."

Mr. O'Lally said this as composedly as though his deciding this question were the simplest thing, and his sisters received the announcement without either wonder or comment; the name of the defeated Mr. Briggs was not even mentioned.

"I see," thought Mab, "O'Lally's Town is to be the capital of this little kingdom, and the bridge must suit him, and after him the world. But where can I have seen him?"

The sound of his voice was strange to her, but that broad forehead, those deeply-set eyes and finely-cut features, seemed familiar from the days of her infancy. Every time their looks met across the table, that sense of recognition haunted her more and more. She grew nervous under it, and shunned his glance, which still pertinaciously sought her. Indeed, Mr. O'Lally looked at Mab with a fixed attention of which he seemed unconscious, and that must have been painful to himself if the severe expression his gaze took, even whilst he talked and jested with her aunt and his sisters, were any clue to his feelings.

“Can we have met?” thought Mab, who was not accustomed to get attention in which neither pleasure nor admiration seemed to blend. But as this did not seem possible, she was searching her memory for the face of which Mr. O’Lally’s reminded her, when two visitors, Dr. Flinn and Mr. Briggs, were announced. Mr. O’Lally rose, and there was no mistaking the mischievous triumph of his sparkling eyes as he heard the latter name. His sisters exchanged looks and half smiled, then rising in their turn, ushered their guests into the sitting-room, where two gentlemen were waiting. The good-humoured and open countenance of Dr. Flinn at once prepossessed Mab; with Mr. Briggs, a tall awkward looking man, whose solemn and sullen face betrayed both temper and dulness—she was not charmed. Mr. O’Lally’s greeting to both was cordial and courteous. With the most amiable communicativeness, he told them how he had been to the other end of Ireland and back again within the last week; what he had seen and done; nothing, in short, could be more open and free than Mr. O’Lally; but he remained standing, and before five minutes had elapsed, he had managed to fix Dr. Flinn near Mab, whilst he remained at liberty to entertain Mr. Briggs.

Dr. Flinn was a fluent talker, and loved the sound of his own voice. Mab had no other trouble

than that of listening to him ; for, to do him justice, he seldom required being answered. This suited Mab, who was intent on watching Mr. O'Lally, for hear him well she could not. The room was large, and he and Mr. Briggs sat at some distance from her : fragments of their discourse reached her ear, but their countenances were her real clue to its tenor. Mr. Briggs long sat solemn and sulky ; it was plain that Shane's bridge weighed heavily on his mind, an unforgiven wrong ; but Mr. O'Lally was all pleasantness and good-humour. He was cheerful and kind, conciliating and seductive. Mab watched him with breathless interest. There was nothing false or perfidious about him, but there was, she felt, a secret subtlety admirably veiled by a genuine and genial manner. Once, indeed, she caught a flash in his eye that contradicted the smile on his lips ; and that reminded her of a royal leopard in amiable mood, but the resistance of Mr. Briggs was not sufficiently strong to draw forth Mr. O'Lally's wrath. It was wonderful to Mab to watch that gentleman's rigid face thaw gradually under the influence of his fascinating neighbour. The heavy cloud of sullenness vanished from the low stubborn forehead ; the obstinate eyes relaxed and twinkled ; the long hooked nose itself took a softer expression, and the thin, ill-tempered mouth opened, and actually laughed.

This result once attained, Mr. O'Lally, who probably knew the duration of his own spells, rose and joined Dr. Flinn. Mr. Briggs remained alone, but to all appearance perfectly happy.

Amongst Mr. O'Lally's gifts, there was one which gave him infinite credit in Mab's opinion—he could compel Dr. Flinn to listen. The conversation became general, and he took no more than his share in it. That was sufficiently large, indeed, as Mr. Briggs remained absorbed in silent content, sitting apart with half-closed eyes, and occasionally smiling to himself; and Mab, withdrawing to the shelter of her aunt's chair, purposely kept in the background, and never opened her lips.

Unobserved as she thought, the imprudent girl had eyes and ears but for Mr. O'Lally. He was no longer bent on the seduction of Mr. Briggs; he was himself once more, and this, Mab felt sure, was his best as it was his truest aspect. She tried in vain to analyse the secret of the attraction which she felt, without his seeking in the least to waken it. He was handsome, but Mab had seen handsomer men; he talked well, without the trite fluency of Dr. Flinn, and with the vigorous and nervous speech of a man of strong intellectual power; but Mab, little though she had been in society, had met one or two men more brilliant, who said smarter things, and knew better how to say them.

But then Mab had never seen a man who seized on her imagination as did Mr. O'Lally. Of all whom she had known, he alone fulfilled her girlish ideal of a hero. There was something about him, now that he was himself once more, between the severity of a priest and the daring of a soldier; something that moved and charmed her very heart.

Yet unconscious of what was passing within her, fearless of danger, Mab allowed herself to dream on. She never thought that her hour had come, that her pride was going to be humbled, that she had found one who could avenge his predecessors without effort. She only thought that he was like one of Plutarch's captains, or of Froissart's knights—that there was something great, tender, and manly about him—and that to admire him was a feeling new in her experience, and full of sweetness and repose. She had no fear of any sort, for instead of seeking his attention, and courting his regard, she felt inclined to keep aloof, happy to hear and observe him. She little guessed her peril—wise in many things as Mab thought herself, and engaged as she was to Robert Ford, she had no knowledge of the heart—she was still “in maiden meditation fancy free;” and would have rejected, with equal indignation and scorn, the imputation of infidelity, and of love at first sight. That subtle intuition of the mind, temper, and whole

being of one who had been a stranger till then, Mab had read and heard of, but never understood. She had not searched into her own conception of this mystery ; but had she done so, she would have found that it held much secret contempt for sudden love. For, as Mab said, with the dogmatic sagacity of her years, "True and noble love rests on esteem, and esteem on experience ; then how can love at first sight be a great or a worthy feeling?"

Oh ! Mab, you are not logical. Esteem does not always rest on experience. Esteem is born of the faith in our own heart, and what matter whether that faith came in years, or in a moment, once it is there ?

But, as we said, she did not think of peril—she only felt it pleasant to sit apart and think, and dream, and with a start and little pleasure, she found herself drawn into the conversation by Miss Emily.

"When will you escort Miss Ford and Miss Winter to the caves?" asked that lady of her brother.

"To-morrow, if the weather permits," he said at once.

"Miss Winter is fond of the sea," pursued Miss Emily, with a little shiver ; "and though I am almost thankful I am getting deaf, so as not to hear its dull roaring noise, we cannot all be of the same taste."

"You like coast scenery," said Mr. O'Lally, addressing Mab.

"Very much so—do not you?" she added, after a brief pause.

Their eyes met, he half smiled.

"At times," he answered.

She looked surprised; he pursued—

"I mean, that when I look at it, I like it well enough; but one cannot always be looking at that sullen Atlantic which shuts us out from the world."

Mab could not argue the point with him; she could better understand the nervous aversion of the twin sisters than the cool indifference of their brother. Besides, there was that about him which made her wish to keep quietly in the background; and, to do him justice, if Mr. O'Lally caused that wish, he showed no inclination to make her break through it; never within the whole of her girlish experience had Mab found her attention less courted than by him, never so completely as in Mr. O'Lally had she failed to detect those subtle signs of pleasurable emotion which youth and beauty waken, and which are as familiar to pretty girls as their A B C to little children. For some reason or other, that gentleman gave her as small a share of his notice as courtesy allowed, and for once Miss Lavinia fairly eclipsed her niece.

This unexpected triumph, which greatly dis-

turbed the lady's equanimity, did not last long. As nine struck, the door opened, and a servant-girl appeared on the threshold with a letter in her hand. Mr. O'Lally rose at once, and was going to apologize for leaving the room, when Dr. Flinn, rising too and taking Mr. Briggs's arm, forestalled him.

"We are going," he said—"are we not, Mr. Briggs?"

"To be sure," answered Mr. Briggs, rising slowly.

"Do not forget the caves, Miss Winter," said Dr. Flinn; "think of the caves."

"And ask Mr. O'Lally to show you where Shane's bridge is to be," suggested Mr. Briggs, addressing Mab for the first time; "you will find it worth your while, Miss Winter."

Mab could not help glancing up at Mr. O'Lally; but his calm face betrayed no ironical triumph. He might be too eager to rule, but he was at least content with ruling; he neither felt nor showed contempt for his subjects; he inflicted none of those wounds which vanity never forgives, and he governed with a despot's truest art.

"I am afraid Miss Winter is tired," said Miss Ellen, when the gentlemen had left the room.

Mab roused herself from her reverie and declared that she was not.

"Now I know what you have been thinking of," continued Miss Ellen, nodding at her with more shrewdness than Mab expected from her. "I saw you looking at our brother—every one does so on seeing him for the first time—it is very striking, is it not? Every one says so."

Mab coloured deeply and felt thoroughly confused.

"It is very singular," said Miss Lavinia, "the first time I saw Mr. O'Lally I could not imagine where I had met him—indeed, I could not take my eyes off of him—now, of course, I am used to it."

"But who is it that Mr. O'Lally is so like?" asked Mab.

Miss Ellen smiled and looked up at a print hanging above the mantelshelf. It was taken from a well-known picture. A fierce battle scene of wounded and dying, stretched across a narrow bridge, and above that conflict rose a slight young figure, with clear aquiline features, and calmly extended hand of command.

"Bonaparte!" cried Mab.

"Yes, Bonaparte, not Napoleon. Our dear brother is not like the Emperor; but he is very like the first consul and the young general."

It was Miss Emily who spoke, and Miss Ellen nodded.

"And the likeness is not merely external, Miss

Winter. Our brother is quite a legislator in his way. He has been the making of this part of the country. There never was such a blessing to this province as when he came to it three years ago—about the time of John's visit."

Mab and Miss Lavinia were startled. They had never heard of that visit.

"I am afraid, too," continued Miss Ellen, "that our brother is rather like General Bonaparte: I am afraid he sets no great value on woman—we can't get him to marry."

"How very strange!" said Miss Lavinia, whose eyes were closing with fatigue.

Miss Emily and her sister exchanged looks, and both ladies asked their guests if they would not like to retire. Mab had never felt more wakeful in her life, but Miss Lavinia confessed she was rather sleepy. They were accordingly shown at once to their room on the first-floor of the house. It was a very large room, with two immense square beds in it. The light of the wax-candle seemed lost in the gloom, which extended from the ceiling to the floor. To Mab this apartment seemed strange and dreary; to Miss Lavinia, who was longing to lay her head on her pillow, it was the epitome of human comfort. Both aunt and niece declined to partake of any further refreshment, and Miss Emily, having given the heavy damask curtains of

the beds a shake, and Miss Ellen having smoothed the dimity cover of the toilet-table which stood between the two windows, the twin sisters bade their guests a last good night, and withdrew.

"I always thought the Irish were hospitable," plaintively said Miss Lavinia, as soon as she felt sure the ladies were out of hearing, "but I fear, I really do, that they are not."

Mab looked surprised.

"I think it dreadful, I do," said Miss Lavinia, quite querulously, "to be kept sitting up when I am dying with sleep. True hospitality would have consisted in showing us to our room and letting us go to bed at once. You may laugh, Mab, but I mean what I say."

"But, aunt, that would have seemed rude."

"I do not care for the seeming, but for the reality; and I repeat it, it is dreadful to have to sit and talk when one's eyes are really closing with sleep."

"Dear aunt, they meant well."

"Well, Mab, you are right. I am not just; after all, they could not guess I was sleepy. How do you like them, Mab?"

"They received us very kindly, aunt."

"Of course, but how do you like them?"

"I do not like people at first sight, aunt."

"Well, I confess I do not like that Mr. O'Lally,"

said Miss Lavinia, lowering her voice, "I think that likeness to Bonaparte quite ominous. You know who Bonaparte was like?"

"Augustus, I believe," dreamily said Mab.

"Yes, I believe he was like Augustus; but he was like some one else too—he was like an Italian condottiere of the sixteenth century, Giovanni of the Black Bands he was called. His portrait was taken by Titian after his death, and is to be seen in one of the galleries in Florence. Ever since Mr. Forbes, who had been a great traveller, and who had seen the picture, told me this, I thought, I really did, that Bonaparte was in some sort born to be either a robber or a conqueror. It was just accident that decided the question; and I think it unfortunate for poor Mr. O'Lally to be like him—do you not think so?"

"Aunt, I always liked Bonaparte, you know."

"Bless me!" cried Miss Lavinia, with a sudden start, "this is Friday!"

"Of course it is—did you not notice that we had a fish dinner?"

"I did not; and we have actually entered O'Lally's Town on a Friday!"

"Never mind, aunt, I feel convinced that Friday shall prove lucky for once."

And whilst Miss Ford lamented, Mab thought of the twin sisters—of their pride in their brother

and his ancient name, and felt stung at a remark which had escaped Miss Ellen that evening: "You look quite like an Irish girl, Miss Winter."

"And perhaps I am," thought Mab, bitterly ;
"who knows what I am?"

CHAPTER III.

ALL bitterness had left Mab's heart by the next morning. What matter even though the worshippers of the O'Lally blood despised what was not even Ford blood, but in their creed no blood at all, they were civil and kind—Mab would ask for no more.

Mab was very much assisted in these philosophic reflections by the consciousness that she was some hundred miles away from Queen Square, taking her holiday on the shores of the Atlantic, under new skies and in a strange land. With this feeling blended another, both novel and delightful: a luxurious sense of having nothing to do, nothing to care for—of moving in an entirely new world, and, though Mab knew it not, of seeing Mr. O'Lally daily.

“I shall read him as I would a wonderful book,”

she thought, indulging herself with a day-dream, whilst her head lay on her pillow and her aunt still slept; "what is there so delightful as to study a vigorous and original character? His is full of contrasts—I could see it last night. His mind is one of the feudal minds. He lives in his own world, his opinions are his own; he is fearless in blame, and, what is still more rare, in admiration. I know him as well as if I had lived years with him. He has received three or four strong impressions, that have become a creed, and to which he clings with Celtic tenacity; his country, his religion, his name, and his honour, are part of his life and his being. He is gentlemanlike after the fashion of the old heroes of history, by the union of strength, mind, and heart; for he is one of God's great creatures. I like his manner to his sisters—it is tender and manly; he loves them with deep and grateful, but not doting affection. Oh! that Robert were more like him!"

This ungracious thought startled Mab. She tried to check it, and could not do so at once. It returned again and again, and Mr. O'Lally stood between her and Robert, smiling calmly at her confusion. Vexed and ashamed, she got up and ran to the window—the sight she saw there calmed her at once, and even Mr. O'Lally was forgotten in the dismal prospect before her: the sky was of

a dull, heavy grey, unrelieved by a cloud, and rain, close and drizzling, veiled the whole landscape in one dreary mist. Mab looked in vain for the sea beyond the garden, which stretched beneath her window. That garden itself, though probably pleasant in sunshine, looked of the most melancholy green in the rain : trees hung their dripping boughs above gravelled paths, and flowers, bent or broken, stood in the grass plot in front. In the centre of that plot a pond reflected the grey sky, and, by its small unceasing circles, reckoned faithfully every drop of rain it received.

"This is dreadful!" thought Mab. "Mr. O'Lally will go out, of course, and I shall be at home all day with those prosy twin sisters."

But when Mab went down with her aunt to breakfast, and saw Miss Emily Ford by daylight, she struck commonplace out of her list of that lady's attributes. She might be narrow and not brilliant, but she was refined and keen—*fine*, as the French say. She seemed, too, to understand at once why, on seeing Mab, Mr. O'Lally's face became suddenly clouded; and she showed some skill in endeavouring to divert Mab's attention from the severe fixedness with which her brother regarded their young guest.

"This is no weather for the caves, Miss Winter," she said to her after breakfast; "but I

can promise you something in exchange—you will not be left to the society of two middle-aged spinsters—we expect a young friend, whom you will like, I am sure.”

“Is Annie coming in this weather?” asked Mr. O’Lally.

“Annie promised to come, and she never breaks her word.”

“You will like Miss Gardiner,” said Mr. O’Lally, addressing Mab; “she is an amiable and good-natured girl.”

“Good-natured!” thought Mab, with rapid intuition, “he does not love her.”

“She is a very superior girl,” said Miss Emily, pointedly.

“And my partner!” rejoined Mr. O’Lally. “Miss Gardiner shares with me the care and the responsibility of a large manufacturing establishment, Miss Winter. We have no Salic law in this part of Ireland.”

“Miss Winter knows how to take that speech,” said Miss Emily, who looked half inclined to be vexed. “The truth is, our brother has it all his own way, and Annie—Miss Gardiner, I mean—knows no more about the business than we do.”

At another time Mab would have had some saucy speech to put in, but now she felt mute, she knew not why. She could not bear Mr. O’Lally

to hear the sound of her voice; she muttered some inarticulate reply, and looked out of the window. She was conscious of appearing shy and foolish, and wished herself far away.

“What *does* ail me?” she thought, looking at the rain, which still steadily poured down; “what is there in that Mr. O’Lally that I should be afraid to answer him? I never fancied that Bonaparte himself would have frightened me—why should his likeness do so? Is he so very like him, I wonder?”

Thinking him engaged with his sister, she turned round to look at him; but Miss Emily’s back was turned to them, and Mr. O’Lally stood within a few paces of Mab, again looking at her intently. Both felt detected, and both reddened, yet for a moment both continued looking. Miss Emily quietly turned round, saw them, and said, in her gentle way,

“Ah! what hour do you leave this morning, my dear brother?”

“I shall go presently,” replied Mr. O’Lally. He went up to her as he spoke, and Mab at once left the room and went upstairs.

She threw the window open, and put out her burning head in the humid air. She felt very unhappy. The love that comes slowly, and twines itself round the heart day after day, is a sweet and

blissful feeling ; but violent and stormy, from its very birth, is the passion which, though born in a moment, is doomed to last a lifetime. Mab did not know what ailed her. There are more mysteries in a girl's heart than she herself can fathom, and most mysterious of all is her first love. Faint as the first streaks of the morning, it often rises over her whole being, gradually illuming its farthest recesses, and filling them with radiance, life, and joy ; but sorrowful from its dawn was Mab's love for Mr. O'Lally. She had a secret and unhappy consciousness that the attraction which drew her towards him, was not returned. She felt ruled and conquered, but she won nothing for her subjection. A painful curiosity seemed to compel his looks to seek hers, but there was neither tenderness nor admiration in that fixed glance.

"I am antipathetic to them all," thought Mab, "but especially to him. He is never more like the stern soldier, or the despotic emperor, than when he looks at me. That Napoleon, of whom we read, who could be gentle, kind, and tender to his sisters, his friends, and his companions-in-arms, he would never be for me—never. I am to him that something which repels us, and which we all meet in life sooner or later."

"My dear Mab, you will take your death of cold," gently said Miss Lavinia, coming in ;

"why, your hair is quite wet ! Do shut that window."

Mab drew in her golden head, which was, indeed, sparkling with dew, but the bright drops on her flushed cheeks had not been left there by the rain. They were the first sad fruit of ill-fated passion.

"I think we had better go down," continued Miss Lavinia.

Mab could not object. Yet she thought of meeting Mr. O'Lally again with something like fear. To her relief he was gone.

"Miss Gardiner will soon be here," said Miss Emily. "You will like our dear Annie, Lavinia. She is so good and so handsome. And she is to stay some time too."

"And she is Mr. O'Lally's partner, aunt," said Mab, who had recovered her tongue.

"Yes," said Ellen, gaily, "and they get on very well together."

"Then, I suppose they mean——" here Miss Lavinia came to a dead stop, feeling that she was going to make an indiscreet speech ; but Miss Ellen, who had understood her quite well, came to her assistance.

"They *ought* to mean, Lavinia ; and they are very fond of each other, too, but somehow or other that is all for the present ; Emily and I let them

alone—they know best, of course, and have a right to take their own time.”

“He does not love her—I am sure he does not,” thought Mab; but she did not ask herself why her heart beat with joy, because Mr. O’Lally, whom she had seen for the first time the evening before, did not love Miss Gardiner, whom she had never seen.

The rain continued to pour steadily the whole day. Mab was beginning to feel and to look disconsolate, when Miss Ellen asked if she would like to see the house. Anything was better than staying quiet, and over the house they went together. Large, heavily-furnished rooms were those at O’Lally’s Town. Only one interested Mab: Mr. O’Lally’s study, on the first-floor. A bookcase held some two or three hundred volumes, and arms, ancient and modern, with plenty of fishing-tackle, testified to Mr. O’Lally’s willingness to mingle other pursuits with those of knowledge.

“You are to take any book you like,” said Miss Ellen, reading Mab’s eyes, “our brother said so.”

Mab expressed her gratitude. Miss Ellen opened the bookcase, and nimbly climbing the steps placed near it, for files of newspapers filled the lower shelves, Mab sat on the last step and leisurely examined Mr. O’Lally’s library.

She had time to do so, for Miss Ellen was called away, and Mab remained alone.

The volumes which formed Mr. O'Lally's stock of reading were well worn. First of all, came Plutarch's *Lives*, done in English, an old edition, in five thick volumes; then Shakespeare, next to him Froissart, then Milton, followed by Homer and Virgil, in classical Greek and Latin; Saint Thomas of Aquinas, unabridged; Dante, in Italian; Don Quixote, in Spanish; and Robin Hood's Garland—all copies that had seen fair usage, testified of no mean linguistic acquirements, and of varied tastes. These filled the two higher shelves; the last was devoted to works on Ireland, of the most varied cast.

Though Mab missed the books she would have liked to find—the gentle modern literature with which she was familiar—she had judgment enough to feel that the mind which could rest content with food so solid, must be one of no common power—Plutarch's heroes, Shakespeare's men and women, Froissart's knights, and Milton's angels, were goodly company for any one. Yet, passing all these by, she fixed her choice on one of the Irish volumes beneath. It proved to be a manuscript translation of the sorrows of the children of Lir—a wild and beautiful tale, which charmed Mab. She read how the beautiful daughter of Lir and

her brothers were metamorphosed into swans ; how they all marvelled at the first sound of the Christian bell ; how they lived with the holy man, and stood at each corner of the altar whilst he said mass ; and she was just going to reach the catastrophe, which makes this one of the three sorrowful tales of Irish literature, when Miss Lavinia appeared, and summoned her away.

Miss Gardiner had arrived, and the twin sisters were anxious to introduce her to Mab.

“Indeed, they care very little about it,” thought Mab ; but she put her book away, and followed her aunt downstairs.

When Mab entered the sitting-room with her aunt, she found the three ladies waiting for her. The Miss Fords were sitting near the table, and Miss Gardiner stood in one of the windows. She turned round on hearing the door open, and, as the light fell full on her face, Mab saw her well. Miss Gardiner was twenty-three or twenty-four years old now. She had clear, regular features, and fine dark eyes—eyes both dark and deep, but Mab did not like their look. Nor did she like the expression of her mouth. It was delicate and well-formed, but it had a cold, disdainful curve, which her smile, remarkably sweet and winning, vainly contradicted.

“She is handsomer, far handsomer, than I am,”

thought Mab, with a keen sense of pain ; “ but I do not like her.”

She tried to check the feeling, and tried in vain—it returned even whilst Miss Gardiner, advancing towards her with her pleasant smile, said prettily enough,

“ I need not tell you how anxious I was to make your acquaintance, Miss Winter ; for I drove ten miles through this rain on purpose to see you to-day.”

“ I always heard the Irish were hospitable,” replied Mab, a little stiffly, “ but I scarcely expected to receive so speedy a proof of it.”

“ We are more than hospitable,” said Miss Gardiner, “ we are inquisitive, and fond of strangers. Now, you have lived your whole life in a city—a large one—one of the largest in the world. A stranger to you is an object of mistrust, scarcely, at least, one of interest ; but think of me, Miss Winter—twenty miles is the full extent of my peregrinations, and a town of six thousand souls the full amount of my city experience. I have known the same people since I was born, and have known none other.”

“ Am I your first stranger ? ” asked Mab, rather amused.

“ No, you are my third. The first was an Italian gentleman, who soon left us ; the second, an

English lady, who had married an Irishman, and who, unfortunately, went away ; and you are the third, and allow me to be selfish, and to hope that you will remain."

"And marry an Irishman," put in Miss Ellen, knowingly.

"Why not?" asked Miss Gardiner, looking round at her. "Miss Winter might go farther and fare worse."

The only Irishman Mab could think of was Mr. O'Lally, and her face burned in a moment. With a beating heart, she thought,

"Oh ! how happy his wife will be !" and for a moment, too, she had a rapid though imperfect revelation of her own feelings ; but Mab was proud, and pride is blind ; so this passing consciousness was not heeded, though it left its trace in the growing dislike with which she regarded Miss Gardiner.

In vain the partner of Mr. O'Lally laid herself out to please the guest of his sisters, Mab herself felt that she was cold ; but there was, apart from her secret and unacknowledged jealousy, something in Miss Gardiner she did not like. She talked with seeming openness, yet, in reality and after more than an hour's conversation, Mab found that the handsome and, apparently, frank Annie, had given her no key to her real nature. On herself, her

feelings, tastes, and habits, Miss Gardiner was wholly silent. Such a person as Annie Gardiner did not seem to exist for her.

"I suppose that is good taste," thought Mab, who knew she was rather prone to being communicative about herself, "but it is chilling, and I do not like it."

Yet, truth compelled her to acknowledge internally that there was nothing cold about her companion; far from it—her manner was not merely cordial, it was also kind.

"She must have a secret, then," was Mab's conclusion. And, perhaps, she was right. Miss Gardiner, cheerful though she tried to seem, had the look of one on whose mind lies the weight of some secret care.

Mab, who was given to hasty conclusions, and whose active mind idleness, the dull day, the rain, and her own growing feelings, rendered doubly quick, at first made sure that Miss Gardiner was secretly pining for her handsome partner, and that this unreturned affection it was which preyed on her mind.

But closer observation altered her opinion. In the first place, the twin sisters, who were anything but reserved women, winked and nodded so much when Mr. O'Lally was mentioned, that it seemed useless for Miss Gardiner to let a thoroughly un-

derstood and approved preference trouble her. This matter, at least, was open enough. In the second instance, not merely did she show no more emotion on such occasions than a smile and a blush could convey, but it was precisely when the discourse was most remote from him, and touched on very different topics, that, to Mab's observant gaze, she grew alarmed and watchful, though why she should be so, it was very hard to say.

The day was well nigh worn, Miss Emily had vanished, intent on some household concern, when Miss Ellen casually said, in allusion to some matter under debate :

"It was in the time of the O'Flahertys. You remember them, Annie?"

Annie gave a little nervous start, but said quietly enough,

"You forget I never knew them."

"I always do forget it—all owing to that dream of mine. You must know, Lavinia, that I always have most curious dreams, and just before the O'Flahertys went to America I had the most extraordinary dream. You remember I told you of it next day, Annie."

"Yes, I remember," said Miss Gardiner, in a low voice; and she went to the window to thread her needle.

"You must know," continued Miss Ellen, "that

I dreamt I was in a great wide waving plain, like an American prairie, and there were the O'Flahertys before me in a log-house, and Mary O'Flaherty, with her pretty yellow hair, laughing at me from the door-step. To say the truth, Miss Winter, Mary was very like you. That is why your face struck me as so familiar and so Irish, I suppose."

Mab smiled, and saw Miss Gardiner give another start, and look up hurriedly at her; then, feeling herself detected, drop her eyes again, whilst her pale cheek flushed.

"Well, that is not all," resumed Miss Ellen; "I had scarcely had time to see Mary, when I saw some one, a woman it seemed, with her back to me and her face to Mary, approach and embrace her"—here Miss Gardiner quietly left the room—"and as she did so, Mary turned pale and paler again, and at length she faded and shrank away into a little heap of dust; then the woman turned round, and who should it be but our own dear Annie there. Why, where is she?"

"Miss Gardiner has left the room," said Mab.

"Just like me," exclaimed Miss Ellen, with a sort of desperate resignation. "I know she cannot bear to hear that dream, and I must needs tell it when she is by."

"What a very remarkable dream," said Miss

Lavinia, who was a dreamer herself, and held all sleeping revelations in mysterious awe.

"Yes, but it was very thoughtless of me to say a word of it opposite Annie. She was in the house when I dreamt it, and when I told it her the next morning she went into a dead swoon at the breakfast-table."

"I daresay she was much attached to Miss O'Flaherty."

"Oh! no—she had never seen her."

"Are you sure?" asked Miss Lavinia.

"Quite certain," answered Miss Ellen, with a little surprise. "Annie was in deep mourning when the O'Flahertys came to this part of the country, and she saw no one until after they had gone to America."

"Perhaps they met," suggested Miss Lavinia.

Miss Ellen shook her head.

"Mary never saw her," she said; "and she never ceased wishing she could have seen 'that pretty Annie of yours,' as she called her."

"Well, then, depend upon it, they are to meet some day," sagaciously said Miss Lavinia. "I am sure of it, after such a dream as that."

"On the day of judgment, then," replied Miss Ellen, with much emotion; "for six months after I dreamed of their meeting, Mary O'Flaherty died in America."

“How very singular!” exclaimed Miss Lavinia, much startled. “What does Mr. O’Lally think about it?” she asked, after a while.

“I never told him of it,” hesitatingly replied Miss Ellen; “he did not like the O’Flahertys, and will never hear their names mentioned.”

“He knew her—he loved her,” thought Mab, with rapid intuition, “and that is why he looks so at me. And I am like her, am I?”

There was a deep old mirror opposite her; she raised her eyes to it, and studied her own image in it.

“So I am like the girl he loved,” she thought again, and there was pleasure and pain in the reflection.

“And what is all that to you?” asked Pride, wakening in alarm.

From the mirror Mab looked back to the window. The rain had ceased, the sky had cleared, and the garden path, which stretched beneath her view, looked practicable. Mab’s resolve was taken at once. Silent and decisive in all she did, she stole out of the room, went up-stairs, returned attired for a walk, and, slipping out of the house unperceived, found herself in the garden.

CHAPTER IV.

THE great change which had taken place at O'Lally's Town had extended to the garden attached to the dwelling-house. The trees were young still, but they were beautifully grouped; the lawns had lovely undulating lines, the flowers were brilliant and varied, and a little river, which fed the pond in front of the house, added to the quiet beauty of the place. It was more of a park than a garden in its main features, though too limited in extent to be called such; but Mab found it a lovely place, and thought that with sunshine and blue sky it must be enchanting, since even on this gray day it was so beautiful.

Walking straight on, she soon reached a broad iron gate, and through its bars she saw an exquisite view of the surrounding country; but this was not what Mab wanted. She retraced her steps, and at

length found a low wooden door in the wall, beyond which she heard the hollow moaning of the sea. It was fastened, but the key was in the lock; and Mab, on opening it, found herself on the shore. The rain had ceased completely, the wind was still, and heavy clouds rolled gloomily away from the stormy sky.

A wild and dreary landscape lay before her, but one that enchanted her, for she remembered none, and had not even imagined any like it. On her left rose purple mountains, a seemingly impenetrable barrier between her and the green landscape, that lay beyond them. From their base stretched a long brown sweep of plain and endless waste, seeming to skirt for ever the rocky coast. Below this the green and heavy waves of the Atlantic retreated to a white line of horizon—that was all, but it was much, for it was infinite and solitude.

The shore was silent and lonely. Mab made her way through the rocks, and stepped down to the water's edge, and walked on in what was literally to her a fever of delight. She had seen the sea at Brighton with sunshine and blue sky; a pretty tame sea it had seemed—a sea for pebbles and shells. This, with its mountains and wild rocks, with its stormy waves and sullen-looking clouds, was another ocean, grand, impressive and sublime. At length Mab stopped; she had reached

a semicircle in the shore, and in the wall of rock that enclosed it, she saw a row of caves and grottoes, sea halls fit for the gods of old, and which the wild spray washed daily.

Mab entered that which was nearest to her; it was also the largest, and she remained breathless at the sight of its loveliness. It was lofty and wide, and filled with a pale green light. All was green around her, from the shallow pool on the sandy floor below to the high rocks of the roof above. Every drop of water was a liquid emerald; it was in green air that she moved, and from the upper end of the cavern issued a stream of green rays, full of softness and beauty. A narrow path wound round the walls of the cave, vanishing in the roof. Did it lead to the source of this mysterious and impalpable light? Mab was not timid, and the path looked safe. She climbed up nimbly, and in a few minutes started to catch a glimpse of cloud and sky. She had reached the end of the path, and with it an opening in the roof, which rocky projections concealed from below.

This opening was beyond her reach, else Mab would have amused herself with looking out, and taking a comprehensive view of sea and shore; but the platform on which she stood afforded a convenient seat, and there she rested and entertained herself with looking alternately down at the

cave, which from this spot had lost its green beauty, and up at the grey sky above.

“Not a week ago, in Queen Square, looking at the poplar tree in our garden, and here to-day,” thought Mab; “the tameness of civilization, and the wildness of nature. Oh! if life could be made up so. If it could be one endless and beautiful change, instead of that weary, dreary, monotony of day creeping after day.”

She looked at the little lake of sea-water below her; then she scanned the rocky edge of the opening in the roof. It was skirted with withered verdure, pale, thin blades of grass, that grew half in and half out, whilst in the air above the gorse vigorously faced the sea breeze. Mab liked this new view of the sky, which met her upturned gaze. Long did she look into the spacious field of grey, which gradually melted into pure azure blue, flecked with clouds as light as the white sea foam. Where did they come from?—where were they sailing away? Aerial travellers, that looked so free and careless, had they a bourn of their own, known to themselves—a goal in some far land? Was there an end to their wanderings?—or, like the accursed man of yore, were they doomed to eternal restlessness? One especially, that long stood still in the zenith, claimed Mab’s attention. It was so clear and transparent, that through it

she saw the sky—so defined and graceful in form, rosy with the flush of sunset, that it seemed to have a being of its own. Vain thought! the wind rose, the cloud struggled awhile, then tore asunder; one half drifted away, wrecked on that blue ocean, the other melted like a thin breath, and soon had vanished utterly from Mab's wistful look.

"They say 'woman is fickle as water,'" thought Mab, "but water itself is not so fickle as a cloud."

She looked down, and started. She was not dreaming surely! That water below her was no longer still; it was flowing, and surely it was higher and fuller! Was this the tide? She was at the bottom of the cave in a moment. Where was the beach along which she had entered?—gone!—gone for ever beneath the swollen waves, that came rushing into the cave, dashing their white spray on its walls of rock!

Mab was constitutionally brave; but death is appalling. Here was no danger against which to strive, but a fatal end to submit to.

She shrank from the pitiless waves, that rose higher and higher every moment, and, giving one long look of despair at the broad and endless ocean before her, she returned to the little platform above, and sat down. She made no effort to escape by that opening. She knew well enough that it would be vain; the rock was steep, and

smooth as glass, and far beyond her height. No—there was nothing for it but to sit and listen to death coming nearer and nearer, with an even step and a hollow sound.

In one moment, rapid, though terrible, Mab's past and present came before her. Her twenty years of life, Mr. Ford, his sister, Robert's love, Mr. O'Lally's pale face, all blended together. Then came gleams of hope, then utter despair—she was so young, life was so sweet. Had they missed her?—were they seeking for her?—were those their voices, or the whistle of the wind, and the cry of some sea-bird? She listened—all was still—and to-morrow, at that hour, all would be over. She saw them—Miss Lavinia crying upstairs in her room; the twin sisters busy below; and their brother talking to Annie in his pleasant voice and with his kindly eye.

And where was she, meanwhile? Lying dead and cold beneath the green waves, floating adrift to the endless wastes of ocean, the prey of strange creatures! The mere thought made her shudder, and filled her with rebellious horror. She looked despairingly at that sky above her, so pitiless, with its white stars coming out of solemn blue depths; she heard the approach of that water which came creeping up to her, and, in her anguish, she uttered a long wild cry for help.

It was answered ; but not by a human voice. Within her Mab heard the answer to that call for aid. She suddenly remembered that she had noticed growing in a cleft of the rock, below the spot where she was sitting, a frail yellow flower, in bloom. If it could grow and blossom there she was safe, for it was sure proof that the waves would not reach her. With a sigh of the deepest relief Mab now contemplated waiting until help would come, and even spending the night where she was.

“ I shall have an adventure to tell uncle, and to write to Robert,” she thought, almost gaily ; for what would have been dreadful, had it come first, was almost entertaining after the short though terrible fears she had passed through.

The adventure, moreover, lost all its heroic proportions as time passed, for not merely did it seem to Mab that the sound of the water below her was retreating, but she felt certain that she heard distant shouts on the shore above. She listened intently, the shouts came nearer ; she raised her voice and answered them ; steps and voices approached ; presently the light of a lantern flashed across the hole of her prison, and Mab heard Miss Emily saying anxiously,

“ Miss Winter—are you safe ? ”

“ I am.”

"Thank God! Michael—you must help her out."

"Give me your hand, Miss," said Michael's voice in the darkness.

Mab obeyed.

"And now the other hand."

She gave him that too. With a strong grasp Michael lifted her out, and Mab stood safe, though trembling on the cliff.

"Thank God!" cried Miss Emily, bursting into tears; "my brother would never have forgiven me."

"There was no danger, ma'am," coolly said Michael, "the water never comes up to the top of the cave."

But Miss Emily was too much agitated to take this consolatory view of the matter. Her hysterical sobs increased and alarmed Mab. She forgot both her recent danger and deliverance, and endeavoured, but in vain, to soothe Miss Emily.

"She would come out," muttered Michael, "and she is so frightened of the sea."

"Pray do go in," urged Mab, and she attempted to take her hand.

But Miss Emily uttered a piercing scream, and, pushing her away, sank back in a fainting fit.

"I shall carry her in, Miss, if you will hold the lantern," said the man, lifting up his mistress.

Mab did as she was bid; they were nearer the house than she thought, and, passing through the garden, they reached it in a few minutes. It was alive with lights; Miss Ellen and Miss Lavinia had just returned from a search in another direction; Mab heard their anxious voices, and above them the quick, startled tones of Mr. O'Lally.

"Emmy—where is Emmy? Why did you let Emily go out?"

He came out into the garden as he spoke. Before Mab could come forward and address him, he had seen his sister in Michael's arms. He sprang forward to her, exclaiming,

"What is it?—what has happened?"

"Miss Emily got frightened about the young lady, and would go and look for her, and she has fainted."

Without a word, Mr. O'Lally seized his sister and carried her into the dining-room. On seeing Emily's pale face, Miss Ellen became violently agitated; Mr. O'Lally looked at Miss Gardiner, and, obeying the glance, she led his sister out of the room.

"I knew something dreadful would happen," said Miss Lavinia, looking at Mab piteously.

"God help me!" replied Mab, "I have done it all."

Miss Emily still lay in her brother's arms. She was rigid and pale, her eyes were half open, and her hands were clenched. Honour, one of the servants, knelt on the floor vainly attempting to revive her. At length some slight symptoms of life appeared on her pale face.

"Emily, my darling—Emily, how are you?" whispered Mr. O'Lally.

Miss Emily looked at him vacantly, sat up, stared and sighed. He spoke again, but she shook her head and shuddered.

"Emily," he urged, "are you hurt? What is it?"

"The sea," she said, shivering—"the sea, and the sea birds."

Mr. O'Lally hastily felt her pulse—it was burning and throbbed wildly. Hints of caution against all excitement or all violent emotion which their medical man, Dr. Flinn, had given him with regard to his two sisters, recurred to him now. The fright had been too great for a mind never very strong.

"Get her room ready," said he to Honour, "quick, I say." he added, stamping his foot with a vehemence which frightened Mab. "She is ill—very ill—I will carry her up-stairs and ride off for Dr. Flinn."

To hear Mr. O'Lally was to obey at O'Lally's Town. Honour did as she was bid, and Mr. O'Lally,

taking his sister in his arms, carried her up-stairs, silently followed by Mab. When he had laid Miss Emily on her bed, Mab went up to him and said impressively,

“You may trust Miss Ford to me, sir.”

“You will not leave her till I come back?”

“I will not.”

Her pale face, her resolute tone struck him. “Very well,” was all he said, and, turning away, he hastily strode down-stairs. In a few minutes Mab heard his horse galloping away along the beach.

Mr. O’Lally had placed his sister on her bed, but she had to be undressed; this Mab and the servant girl proceeded to do; she offered them no resistance, though she still spoke unconnectedly. Mab was much affected, but remained calm.

Honour, an orphan girl, whom the twin sisters had sheltered and received in the hour of need, wept bitterly.

“It will be the death of Miss Nelly,” she said, “it will be her death. Miss Nelly cannot bear to see her sister’s little finger hurt, and to see and hear her so will be the death of her.”

“I hope not,” exclaimed Mab; “pray do not speak so. It will be nothing; depend upon it—it will be nothing.”

“It was to be,” said Honour, with a solemn shake of the head; “it was to be, Miss, and it has

been coming on. Miss Emmy was flighty for the last week. The master thought it was her spirits were up, but she was flighty, and to-night's fright finished it."

"For God's sake, say no more!" said Mab, almost piteously.

Honour saw how remorse stung her, and being, like the ignorant of most nations, a strict though unconscious predestinarian, she administered comfort after her own fashion.

"The Lord in heaven bless you, Miss," she said, kindly, "*you* had no hand in it. You are as innocent as the babe unborn. It was to be, Miss."

Mab shook her head, but would not pursue the argument; and Honour, who was not of a loquacious turn, held her peace.

Both were sitting near the bed of the suffering lady, Mab at the head, Honour at the foot; between them stood a little table, on which burned the unsnuffed candle, which Honour had brought up from the kitchen. It lit dimly the whole of the large room. Mab had eaten little or nothing since the morning; and though she was too much agitated to feel hunger, she was faint and dizzy with her long fasting. The room seemed to her feverish gaze to swell to a preternatural size; the ceiling rose, the walls expanded, the very curtains extended to solemn and pall-like vastness. She tried

to shake off the delusion ; and without venturing to look at the bed, she gazed steadily at Honour's good-natured but common-place features. Here she saw no change, for imagination had no hold. The low brow, the dull eyes, the heavy mouth, were the same she already knew, though disfigured and swollen by tears that still trickled down the ruddy cheeks. But the sight of the woe she had caused was more than Mab could bear. She closed her eyes, and hid them with her hand. Then her hearing became acutely sensitive. She could distinguish Miss Ellen's hysterical laughter rising from below, spite the closed doors of the sitting-room ; and in the vague murmur that accompanied that dismal sound, imagination made her fancy that she caught Miss Gardiner's gentle tones and her aunt Lavinia's hesitating voice. She knew it could not be, yet the more she repelled the fancy, the stronger it grew, until words and fragments of discourse sounded distinct and clear in the old house.

"Better look than listen," thought Mab. She removed her hand, glanced at Honour, who was devoutly saying her beads, and from her turned resolutely to Miss Emily Ford. The sick lady's eyes were half closed ; she looked asleep. Honour nodded, as much as to say that she was sleeping, but did not speak.

The house was very silent now—silent as death, and both Mab and the servant felt that strange stillness oppressive.

“Master is not coming back,” whispered Honour, looking uneasy.

Mab looked as if she felt anxious, but did not answer.

“I wonder how is Miss Nelly?” whispered Honour, after another silence.

“You can go and see, if you like,” replied Mab.

The girl hesitated.

“You had better go, Miss,” she said; “it will rest you, and I dare not leave you alone.”

“No—no. I will not go—I am not afraid—besides, I promised Mr. O’Lally I would not leave his sister.”

Honour hesitated again, but at length softly saying she would not be a minute, she stole downstairs, leaving the door open.

The room was chill; a keen sea-breeze had arisen, and Mab shivered. She felt dizzy too, and was sinking with weakness. A sense of misery woke within her, and with it confused memories. A few hours ago she was in the cave, facing what seemed certain death; and now the evil fate had passed from her and rested on an innocent head; and either seemed a dreadful nightmare, full of wild and dreary images.

"Is she gone?" whispered a voice, whose hot breath fanned her neck.

Mab turned round, started, and met Miss Emily's glittering eyes full upon her.

"I see she is gone," resumed Miss Ford; "and now, Annie, I can speak to you. Annie, Mary O'Flaherty is *not* dead; she came last night—but he shall marry you, Annie. She is a beggar, and you, Annie, will make a great man—a real O'Lally of him yet."

Mab was too much amazed and frightened at this address to utter one word of soothing. Time to do so was not given her, for, starting out of bed, Miss Emily clasped Mab in her arms, and renewed her vehement and incoherent words of endearment. In vain the sense of her danger rushed to the young girl's mind: escape was out of the question—she was held in a firm grasp, and to raise an alarm was perilous; for the wild fondness of Miss Emily looked ready to break out into fierceness.

Trembling with terror, yet mistress of herself, Mab said, softly:

"Go back to bed and tell me all about it. He is a real O'Lally, is he not?"

"Hush! Ellen must not know," mysteriously replied Miss Emily. "She thinks that Mary is dead. But she is not dead. Oh! I knew her at once—and so did he; did you see how he looked

at her? Annie, I am afraid he loves her still."

"No—no, he does not," said Mab, not knowing in her fear what she said.

"I tell you he does!" angrily rejoined Miss Emily; "he could not take his eyes off of her last night and this morning. He said *you* were handsomer, but that was to deceive us. He always did like fair women best, and she is handsomer now than before she died—far handsomer, Annie."

"So you think he likes her?" said Mab, trying to smile and seem calm.

"I am sure he does; but speak low—she is listening at the door. We shall go and lock it, Annie dear, we shall lock ourselves in."

And still holding Mab in her embrace, Miss Emily attempted to drag her to the door, for the purpose of locking it. Had Mab's hands been free, she would have had self-possession enough not to resist; but they were pinned to her sides, and the sense of her helplessness rendered doubly terrible the prospect of being locked up with the delirious Miss Ford. The silence of the house, the height of the staircase, precluded all hope of speedy assistance. It was useless to scream, and she did not; but she resisted with all her might.

"Ah! pussy," said the mad woman—for she was mad then, and she spoke with a playfulness that

was frightful to the poor girl—"ah! pussy, you must—you must!"

In spite of Mab's desperate resistance, the door was reached. Holding her fast with one frail arm, now turned into steel by the strength of fever, Miss Emily stretched out the other and turned the key in the lock.

"Ah! pussy," she said, laughing, "you are caught, pussy—you are caught!"

It was then that Mab heard steps and voices in the hall below, and uttered a piercing cry for help. Miss Emily's hand attempted to stifle it on her lips; but it had been heard—a man's step rushed up quickly, followed by another; the door was burst open. Mr. O'Lally entered and took hold of his sister, whilst Doctor Flinn, stepping round behind her, held her fast. Miss Emily did not resist, and she quietly released Mab, who, still shivering with horror, sank on a chair.

CHAPTER V.

"YOU need not hold me so tight, Doctor Flinn," composedly said Miss Emily. "I know you think me mad, but you are mistaken."

"Mad! not a bit of it!" said Doctor Flinn; "but you are excited, and so you frightened the young lady. I think you will be best in bed, Miss Emily."

"I think so too, and therefore I shall thank you and my brother to leave the room, Doctor Flinn."

Miss Emily spoke in tones of ice, and Doctor Flinn said soothingly :

"To be sure; and here is Honour. Honour, help your mistress to bed. Mr. O'Lally, Miss Winter, let us leave Miss Emily."

Mab rose mechanically and went out, followed by Mr. O'Lally and Doctor Flinn. They did not go down the staircase, but stood on the broad land-

ing ; a candle which Honour had brought up, and which she had placed on the sideboard near the door, gave them light.

“And now, my dear young lady,” said Dr. Flinn, fastening a keen look on Mab’s face, “will you just tell us what passed?”

“Miss Emily spoke strangely, and wanted to lock the door,” replied Mab, hesitatingly.

“Oh ! she spoke strangely ; and pray what did she say?”

Mr. O’Lally saw Mab start nervously as Dr. Flinn put the question, and her face burned, and her eyelids fell. She said at length,

“I believe there was some confusion in Miss Emily’s mind concerning my identity. She spoke to me as if I were Miss Gardiner, and spoke of me as if I had been another person, like whom, it seems, I am.”

“Any one can see that,” remarked Doctor Flinn, emphatically.

Mr. O’Lally did not appear to have understood Mab, and said anxiously.

“Well, Doctor Flinn, what do you think of that ? Is it brain fever?”

“No, it is nervousness, no more.”

“Thank God !”

Doctor Flinn shook his head.

“It is nervousness,” he said again, “but another

such attack, and Miss Emily's mind is gone for ever."

Mab looked at him: his brow knit, his lips tightened, but he showed no other signs of emotion.

"You know what I told you long ago," pursued Doctor Flinn; "two better women than your sisters do not exist, but their father died mad, and they are weak-minded. Miss Emily, the keener of the two, is most in peril—Miss Ellen's good-humour will carry her through, I hope."

Mr. O'Lally drew a deep breath.

"My poor sisters!" he said.

And in the tone in which he uttered the words, Mab read the story of his deep tenderness. Their very weakness and infirmity had twined them for ever round his heart-strings.

"Do you think the fit is over?" he asked, after a while. "She knew us, you see."

"That is not the question—is the confusion in her mind, which this young lady caused, over?"

Mr. O'Lally looked at Mab, and she said eagerly, yet scarcely repressing a shudder as she made the offer:

"Shall I go in?"

"Not now," replied Doctor Flinn, "but an hour hence it may not be amiss."

"I shall come in an hour," said Mab; and, leav-

ing the two gentlemen on the landing, she went down-stairs to her aunt's room. She found Miss Lavinia sitting on a chair in a state of complete distress. She was more than distressed, she was thoroughly bewildered. She saw that Mab was scarcely equal to explanation or comment, and though she felt much perplexity concerning the real causes of this series of mishaps, exclamations rather than questions showed her feelings.

"Those dreadful caves!" she said, "I am sure I shall have a horror of caves."

Mab made no answer; she was sitting on a chair, thinking of Doctor Flinn's ominous predictions, of the terrible evil she had caused, and with her eyes fixed before her, and her hands clasped on her knees, she looked a picture of dejection. Her woe-begone face struck her aunt.

"My dear child!" she said tenderly, "do bear it better."

"Aunt, it is dreadful!" replied Mab.

She threw herself, ready dressed, on her bed, and lay there with closed eyes. Miss Lavinia walked restlessly up and down the room, then sat down, then got up again, and finally went to bed, and, fatigue prevailing over agitation, she fell fast asleep.

Mab then sat up in her bed, smoothed her loosened hair, and softly got up. Walking on tiptoe, she

left the room and glided up-stairs to that of Miss Emily. A ray of light stole out through the half-open door on the gloom of the landing; everything seemed quiet within. Mab gently pushed the door open. Mr. O'Lally was watching alone by Miss Emily's bed.

"I have come," whispered Mab. "Is it time?"

Before he could answer, the door, which Mab had half closed, again opened, and Miss Gardiner entered, and, softly stealing round to Mr. O'Lally's chair, whispered that his sister Ellen wanted him.

He looked at Emily, who lay calm enough to all appearance, and with her eyes closed, at Miss Gardiner, and at Mab, and, feeling that they could remain without him for a few minutes, he left the room.

"How is Miss Ellen?" asked Mab, softly.

"Better; but Doctor Flinn says she must not see her sister, and we find it hard to keep her away."

"And I have done all this," said poor Mab, with despair.

"Annie, dear Annie," called Miss Emily, in a low tone, "come to me, Annie."

Miss Gardiner went up to the bed, but the sick woman gave her a stern look.

"I said Annie, not you."

"Well, and am I not Annie?"

"Not you—you are Mary O'Flaherty."

Annie turned pale as death, but Miss Emily only nodded at her.

"I knew you at once," she said, "at once. When you came the other night I told Ellen so. I want Annie, and there is Annie," she added, catching sight of Mab, and immediately stretching out her hand and taking hold of the young girl's arm.

"She takes you for me," said Miss Gardiner, endeavouring to rally.

"And she takes me for Mary O'Flaherty," said Mab, looking at her.

But Annie Gardiner's face remained rigid and cold.

"Perhaps you are like her," she said, at length. "I never saw her."

"Yes, you did," said Miss Emily, half angrily; "I showed you Annie's likeness, and you said you did not like her—that she had a false face; and from that moment, Mary O'Flaherty, I disliked you—but you are dead, thank God, dead and gone—only don't get alive again—do not—that is all I ask of you."

"Poor thing!" sadly said Miss Gardiner, "how she wanders!"

Mab thought there was strange method in all Miss Emily's wanderings; but she kept her

thoughts to herself. She still stood by the bed, her hand clasped in the sick lady's, and Miss Gardiner, though out of sight, was still near Miss Emily's pillow, when the door gently opened, and Mr. O'Lally came in. Before he could speak, his sister exclaimed ardently,

"There he is, Annie—she shall not have him. We will have no grey-eyed, no yellow-haired Marys here."

The two girls had not expected this, and stood confounded. Mr. O'Lally, taken by surprise, looked from one to the other; Annie had turned pale, and averted her eyes from his; Mab bent her blushing face on her bosom. Spite of himself, his look lingered on her; never had he seen so graceful an image of wounded maiden pride as now stood there before him.

But, quickly recovering his self-possession, he went to his sister, and, bending over her, he attempted to soothe her. Annie, after remaining mute and motionless for a few seconds, stole out of the room, closing the door after her. Mab would gladly have followed her, but could not—Miss Emily still held her hand firmly clasped.

"My poor sister is still delirious," said Mr. O'Lally; "she still takes you for Miss O'Flaherty—and—and," he added, raising his eyes to Mab's face, "you are wonderfully like her."

"He loved her," thought Mab, unconsciously jealous of that dead mistress.

Tired with standing, she tried to release her hand from Miss Emily's grasp, but she was held fast. Mr. O'Lally at once endeavoured to assist her, but his sister's slender fingers seemed of iron, and her imploring words,

"Don't take away Annie," made him hesitate.

"Do not," said Mab, "she will soon let me go of her own accord."

"If you will be so good as to wait, it may be best," he replied with a grateful look.

Mab knelt on the rug, and gently whispering to Miss Emily, attempted to coax her into giving her her liberty; but Miss Emily only answered her with a ghastly smile, and a "No—no, pussy," that reminded Mab of the evening's adventure, and made her shiver. She could not help looking at Mr. O'Lally—he stood within a few paces of her, unconscious of her fears, but a security against all danger.

"You will get faint and tired so," he said anxiously.

"Ah! do not think of me," replied Mab, looking up; "I am the cause of all this."

Mr. O'Lally stood with his left arm resting on the head of his sister's bed. He bent to hear Mab, who knelt before him, and spoke low. Her up-raised face, on which the light fell full, shone clear

and bright on the dark background of the room. Something in those soft grey eyes, in that sad, though sweet, smile, seemed to smite him, for he started back, like a man who receives a blow he cannot ward. The cloud again came to his face ; he rang the bell, Honour appeared in a few minutes, and, motioning her to attend to Mab and his sister, Mr. O'Lally went to the window, and stayed there looking out at the dark night.

He came no more to look at Mab ; it was best not, no doubt ; and thus the night wore, and grey dawn streaked the eastern sky. He looked round, Honour stood by him.

"Miss Emmy's sleeping, sir," she whispered, "and the young lady too."

She glanced towards Mab, and Mr. O'Lally followed the look ; Mab, tired with kneeling, had laid her head on the edge of the bed ; she had, at first, closed her eyes, then had fallen asleep for very weariness. Her loosened hair was as a golden shower around her face ; her dark eyelashes rested peacefully on her cheeks, flushed with sleep ; her rosy lips were parted like a child's, and child-like and happy looked her slumbers.

But wild and stormy were Mab's dreams. She was in the cave again by the sea-shore, and she was there with Mr. O'Lally ; the foaming waves surrounded them, and Miss Emily, standing on

the shore above, bade them rise higher and higher.

“Higher,” she screamed, her voice rising louder than the roar of the ocean, “we will have no grey-eyed, no yellow-haired Marys here.”

And Mr. O’Lally, smiling, said,

“We cannot live together, but we can die together, Mary.”

It was then she awoke, and saw him standing before her, and Honour by him, bearing a tray, on which was a glass-full of sparkling yellow wine.

“Pray drink this,” said Mr. O’Lally, taking the glass, and handing it to Mab.

She took it, but her left hand alone was free, and it shook as she lifted the glass to her lips; he stooped to steady her hold, and, as he did so, their eyes met. They forgot his sleeping sister—they forgot Honour, who stood by amazed, for no woman could see that look and mistake its meaning. It was love mutual—unconfessed, but ardent and impassioned. Sudden and violent love—the love that does not tarry for time.

Mab turned pale as death, for the thought of Robert shot through her heart like a keen arrow of pain. And Mr. O’Lally bit his lip, and turned his head away, for, in the very moment that he was conscious of his passion for this nameless girl,

he vowed never to indulge it by making her his wife.

In her emotion, Mab spilled the wine, and mechanically moved her right hand, still held by Miss Emily. She awoke at once, and saw her with dilated eyes.

"The ghost!" she cried, dropping Mab's hand with horror; "the dead girl!—take her away!—take her away!"

Mab started to her feet, and, instinctively, threw herself behind Mr. O'Lally for protection.

"Do not be afraid," he whispered; "but pray leave the room—she no longer takes you for Annie."

Mab obeyed, and softly stole out. As she went down the staircase she met Annie Gardiner coming up with a light in her hand.

"You may go in now," said Mab to her, "the fit is over. You will be yourself again—I am Mary O'Flaherty now."

Miss Gardiner did not reply, and, looking at each other, the two girls felt rivals and enemies from that hour.

END OF VOL. II.



His eyes are blue, cold as the Arctic sun,
His shape majestic stout, ~~stands~~ like a fun;
His hair is sandy as a Scotchman's wig,
His nose is short, his hands & feet are big,
With any man in Britain he will swing.

With all these German merit out of nurse
And not a single stiver in his purse

Thinking the Danes with his first bay & fighter —
A very Milton, self-esteem'd a Titan —

Augustenborg ^{clay} ~~self~~, Helderlein & Schlering

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